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Uncertain surrenders: The coexistence of beauty and menace in the maternal bond and photography

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Uncertain surrenders: The coexistence of beauty and menace in the maternal bond and photography.

Toni Wilkinson

This thesis is presented in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
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USE OF THESIS

The Use of Thesis statement is not included in this version of the thesis.

Abstract

This creative inquiry is grounded in my maternal experiences and situated within a feminist approach to photography that develops a discussion of maternal passion and acknowledges the conflicting dynamics of the maternal relationship. The research includes a book of photographs of my children, Georgia and Henry, titled *Uncertain surrenders*, and a written component explicating the theoretical imperatives that motivated the project. I suggest that the coexistence of beauty and menace within the photographic portraits exquisitely represents the complexity of maternal passion. Julia Kristeva (2005) says, “we lack a reflection on maternal passion” in Western culture because it is an ambiguous passion composed of negative and positive aspects that are difficult to understand. I propose that by accommodating the uncertainties arising from the ambiguities of maternal passion in the photographic portrait, it is possible to strengthen mutual recognition between mother and child. These photographs are intimate collaborations between my children, Georgia and Henry, and myself that represent our mutual connection. The climate of fear that surrounds images of children in contemporary culture has introduced restrictive practices and protocols for maternal photographers and threatens to limit the production of images that represent the complexity of the maternal relationship. In this research I acknowledge the ‘mother photographer’ to broaden the scope of female subjectivity, increase the status of motherhood and to agitate conventional restrictive notions of maternity that persist in the twenty-first century.

Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

- i. incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;*
- ii. contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text of this thesis; or*
- iii. contain any defamatory material;*

Signed

Date

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"An image is a stop the mind makes between uncertainties" Djuna Barnes (1937, p. 111).

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Introduction

'Being conscious of, and cultivating one's own relation with the mother is crucial to reach sharing in difference" (Luce Irigaray, 2008, p. 31).

Sprung from the surrender to uncertainty that motherhood demands and a desire to generate a discussion of 'maternal passion' in culture which acknowledges the conflicting dynamics of maternity, this inquiry is situated within a feminist approach to photography and grounded in my experiences of motherhood. My research comprises a book of photographs of my children, Georgia and Henry, and a written component explicating the theoretical imperatives that motivated the project. Some of the photographs from this research have been exhibited as large prints for solo exhibitions across Australia and I anticipate that more of the works included in the book will result in future exhibitions. I have titled the series of photographic 'portraits' in the book and the dissertation *Uncertain surrenders* to signal my maternal ambivalence to the project. I propose that acknowledging the simultaneous conflicting feelings a mother has towards a child enables a greater understanding of the maternal bond. Moreover, the title suggests the coexistence of beauty and menace in the maternal relationship, the photographic process, and each image in this series. The controversy that surrounds childhood photography is intimated too by the title of the exegesis, as are my concerns about the social scrutiny to which maternal photographers who take photographs of their children are subjected.

It is my intention in this inquiry to deliberate about and develop an understanding of the significance of maternal passion which continues to be denied in contemporary society. 'Maternal passion', Julia Kristeva (2005) asserts is difficult to come to in the public arena because it is a complex passion that is not easily understood. Kristeva (2005, p. 2) believes that because of "the complexity of this passion even mothers participate... in obscuring it: they would rather benefit from this vision of the woman as sacred and the marketing of the 'perfect child'... than weigh out the risks and benefits that this passion holds." It remains difficult for most to acknowledge that the maternal is "inhabited by the negative" (Kristeva, 2005, p. 2) and therefore a denial of maternal passion pervades both public and private realms. Furthermore, images that engage with maternal passion are not commonly seen in conventional representations of the maternal bond; nor do they feature in the still male- subjugated domain of art institutions. This thesis titled *Uncertain surrenders* refuses the pallid veneer of contribution to the cultural bank of uniform representations of the maternal relationship which persist in most media images.

This investigation also explores the power of the photographic portrait to provide new opportunities for subjectivity and photography's capacity to facilitate the opportunity for a maternal return in representation. *Uncertain surrenders* is a collaborative inquiry between my children and myself that implies a complex and enduring maternal relationship. I postulate that the exchange occurring in photographic practice also provides unique possibilities for subjective exploration in a shareable realm. Hence, the construction of this *Uncertain surrenders* reflects a tentative, mutual give and take that facilitates new beginnings and opportunities for both mother and child. Nevertheless, although the photographic component of the research is the result of a shared journey between my children and myself, I accept that as the mother and photographer it is my influence and perspective that has shaped this maternally framed research.

The first chapter titled 'Theorising the maternal', describes the development of the maternal in feminist psychoanalysis which is the theoretical framework for the research. I examine Julia Kristeva's extension of feminist, post –Freudian psychoanalysis to reinvigorate the maternal function and reflect on maternal passion. Kristeva (2004) resists Freud's overinvestment of the paternal function in psychoanalysis through an acknowledgement of Melanie Klein's theory of object relations, which foregrounds the maternal function. Kristeva's return to Klein exemplifies the significance of the maternal experience and the coexistence of negativity and sublimity in the maternal, which both women have postulated in their thinking. Importantly, Kristeva (2004) cites Klein as being the first to recognise the potential of maternal ambivalence to facilitate a maternal return following the ongoing separation of mother and child. Roszika Parker's ideas on maternal ambivalence are also acknowledged as instructive for this research. According to Parker (2006, p. 1), the more a mother can identify difficult feelings towards her child the greater the capacity for creativity in the maternal relationship. Moreover, Parker (2006, p. 1) states "if a mother can be herself with a child, and truthfully show joy, hate, love, satisfaction — the full range of emotions — that will help the child to know themselves." An exploration of the potency of maternal ambivalence in feminist psychoanalytic theory, and the facility of ambivalence to develop subjective understanding, molds the creative component of this project.

According to Hunt (1991, p. 71) "feminism is predicated on the assumption that women are authorities with regard to their own lives." Throughout my art practice I recognise, integrate and celebrate feminist art principles which have opened the gates for women to share their own stories and desires via photography. "The camera could be used to identify... from a personal-political perspective" (Catriona Moore, 1994, p. 2) and many female photographers have combined a theory and practice approach in their exploration of maternity. Edge and Baylis (2004) maintain that it is crucial to acknowledge the feminist recognition that personal decisions can facilitate political outcomes that elevate the status of women and children in society. The ability to agitate the

boundaries of the private and personal with the public realm has been embraced by feminist art practitioners as an emancipatory tool, one that is particularly useful for transgressing conventional ideas of family photography as innocent and safe. "This academic and practical recognition that domestic photography is part of female culture, combined with feminism's critical interrogation of the personal, led many feminist artists and theorists to look at the family album" (Edge & Baylis, 2004, p. 79). Gillian Rose in her 2010 book, *Doing family photography: the domestic, the public and the politics of sentiment*, asserts that the taking and looking at family photographs is a way women "negotiate a specific and complex relation' to their children" (2010, p. 42). Rose argues that only a few critics have addressed this concern (Gallop, 1999; Leonard 1999, Mavor, 1999 and di Bello, 2007). As such this is an area that needs to be examined and I hope that my own domestic, personal, photographic practice within a feminist context will contribute to the maternal photographic oeuvre. I too examine my own domestic, personal, maternal photographic practice within a feminist context.

My research follows the emerging discipline of practice-led research, which involves a progression of knowledge to effect the construction of creative practice. As such the academic research for this project has influenced the creative outcomes of the photographs I have produced. Practice-led research is a developing research approach and as such not easy to clearly define. According to Smith and Dean (2009, p. 5) "in the discourse of practice-led research the idea of the artwork as research, and the artwork plus surrounding documentation as research, occurs with different degrees of emphasis in the work of different commentators." Thus, different researchers will place varied emphasis on the ways that knowledge is expressed and/or emerges through the research. Bolt (2007), Haseman (2006) and Smith and Dean (2009) agree that practice-led research entails the combination of theory and practice though the emphasis on either component is dependent on the researcher's particular approach. Nevertheless, practice-led research should generate research insights through both the creative work itself and the theorisation and documentation of the creative process involved in producing the work.

The interconnection of theory and creative practice is critical for practice-led research. According to Smith and Dean (2009, p. 7) "in using the term practice-led research... we would expect a research element to be present in both research and work creation, though we would normally see the documentation, writing and theorisation surrounding the artwork as crucial to its fulfilling all the functions of research." In this research project I have interwoven creative practice and theory to contribute to the field of creative photographic production from a feminist position, foregrounding the significance of the maternal. Creative practice can initiate "a very specific sort of knowing, a knowing that arises through handling materials in practice" (Bolt cited in Smith and Dean, 2009, p.

6). The images in my research therefore, are reflective of feminist theories that I have incorporated into my practice to initiate and expand maternal 'knowing' through practice-led research.

My methodology employs feminist photographic research methods. Articulated by Panizza Allmark as a *photographie féminine* (2002, 2009) it involves combining qualitative research to explore a visual arts practice with French feminist theories of the feminine body. French feminist psychoanalysts like Julia Kristeva, Helene Cixous and Luce Irigaray have expanded and manipulated the ideas of Freud and Lacan in their writings to demand a re-evaluation of and reconnection with the maternal by encouraging women to write their own bodies through creative endeavours. Furthermore, Stephen Spencer (2011, p. 2) in a discussion of Allmark's *photographie féminine*, says that to "engage with the visual elements of social phenomena is a valuable resource for supplementing the traditional tools of qualitative methods for understanding about society, culture and the increasingly visual nature of our everyday lives." Furthermore, *photographie féminine* engages with "an intimate, embodied approach" (Allmark, 2009, p. 276), which is relevant to my own work and personal engagement as a mother photographing her children through the once— shared realm of her maternal body. I also practice Kristeva's 'herethics', which David Crownfield (1992, p. 34) describes as "a new ethical conception based on woman as mother, as a prototype or metaphor for one who deals with the other through love." 'Herethics' presents me with the opportunity for my deep connection to and love for my children to challenge restrictive representations of the maternal bond. I therefore adopt a *photographie féminine* and 'herethical' approach, which is developed from the maternal rather than the paternal position, to embrace and acknowledge the other.

The book of photographs in this research was influenced by Kristeva's poetic account of maternity in *Stabat Mater* (1986.p. 133-134) where she describes the 'epiphany' of childbirth as "photos of what is not yet visible and which language necessarily surveys from a very high altitude, allusively.... From one to the other, eternally fragmented visions, metaphors of the invisible." The images I have made are metaphors for the complex feelings I have for my children; therefore they unveil a part of myself. Allmark's *photographie féminine* follows Cixous's (1976, p 879) appeal that "woman must put herself into the text— as into the world and into history— by her own movement." *Photographie féminine* pronounces that female photographers must use their photographic practice to reveal themselves. Allmark (2003, p. 101) states " In my *écriture/ photographie féminine*, I am writing my womanly body, drawing on the much— cited feminist phrase that the personal is political." I utilise this *photographie féminine* approach to resist closure and provide opportunities for maternal revelation.

Throughout the photographic images I have incorporated certain photographic conventions (for example lighting, angle and lens choice) to encourage critical, subversive, resistant readings that reveal childhood as ambiguous and complex. The photographs reference what Anne Higonnet (1993) describes as the potential for childhood to emerge as “knowing” by maternal photographers. The images of Georgia and Henry are mostly taken over a four-year time frame from 2008–2011; thus they depict various stages of childhood (though a few from an earlier period are also included). During this period Henry was aged 5 – 10 years and Georgia 13–18 years. This extended time span allowed for the revelation of complex childhoods. The photographs portray Georgia and Henry in multiple poses and locations. They are seen, for example, playing, sitting, wounded, standing, engaged, detached, separate, together, embracing, vulnerable and strong. The significance of the different postures and expressions works to establish their childhood and the maternal relationship as contradictory, innocent yet shadowed; the variables therefore provide an alternative less sentimental vision of childhood than is commonly revealed in conventional photography. The different ages and developmental changes in Georgia and Henry over this time are significant and add to the overall depth of meaning in the research.

Along with attention to pose, gesture and location, I engage other photographic technical conventions to introduce tension and variables in the images that reveal multiple opportunities for depicting childhood and maternity. The images are taken on colour transparency film using a medium format Pentax 6x7 camera and are dark in overall tone. The large format camera was used in this research in a less formal manner than it is in conventional advertising and professional photography; there is no use of tripod to steady the frame and instead a more cavalier approach, which is often tied to documentary was used to imply disturbance. The photographs blend the stylistic devices of both documentary and art photography, which is distinctive of my individual photographic approach. Each photograph combines the artistic devices of pose and performance with a more candid approach that is traditionally linked to documentary style photography. Lighting devices were amalgamated to incorporate both available and introduced light sources. The mixed light sources introduce layers that reveal tension and contradictions in the images.

Most of the photographs in this series are portraits. I utilise the portrait because it has a unique ability to introduce paradox. Bright (2005) says of the photographic portrait:

Laden with ambiguity and uncertainty the portrait is perhaps the most complex area of artistic practice... a portrait is the questioning or exploration of self and identity through a literal representation of what somebody looks like. The paradox is that the inner workings of the complex human psyche can never be understood just by looking at the picture (p. 20).

These portraits of my children are not simply literal representations of fixed childhood or individuals, but rather visual metaphors of my own maternal feelings for them. Robert St Clair (2000) maintains “metaphors are really statements based on some kind of analogy where two things are compared to each other.” Moreover, Kristeva (cited in Lechte & Margaroni, 2004, p. 67) says, “love is a flight of metaphors; it is literature, love is a series of rebirths and separations.” Kristeva also maintains that images must agitate, question and demand interrogation of all identity. We must work against imagery that “manages humans through a bombardment of stereotypical images which calm the anxieties in the first instance and prevent interrogation” (Kristeva cited in Lechte & Margaroni 2004, p. 154). My photographs resist stereotypical representations of motherhood, incorporate Kristeva’s and French *féminine* psychoanalytic theory in practice, and embrace metaphor to unveil my own melancholic maternity. Nevertheless, though I express a melancholic element through the images, I also draw from the idea that they will reflect the creative potential of the maternal tie.

In ‘Theorising the maternal’ I also explore Kristeva’s ideas on the *chora*, the semiotic and the abject as a means of recalling the maternal body into culture. Kristeva articulates a discourse of maternity by identifying a semiotic component of language that is aligned with the rhythmic tones of the maternal body. The semiotic force is linked to the spatial ‘*chora*’ whose “drives hold sway and constitute a strange space” (Kristeva, 1986, p. 14). The semiotic *chora* references the unstable maternal body and therefore allows for a transgression of the symbolic, presenting an opportunity for subversive, subjective revelations. Kristeva (1986, p. 115) maintains that all creative practice should necessarily recall the ‘maternal *chora*’ to disrupt the symbolic order. Furthermore Kristeva’s theory of the abject developed in *Powers of horror* (1982) is also related to the potency of the uncontrollable maternal body. The abject is linked to the perverse and provides unique opportunities for both alternative readings of texts and for subversive artistic representations; thus I have incorporated the abject as a seditious device within these photographs. The theory discussed throughout the first chapter of this exegesis develops a framework for my praxis, which affirms the significance of the complex maternal relationship in photography. Thus it outlines and connects the ideas that circulate within the creative content of the photographs in *Uncertain surrenders*. Necessarily, I have embraced the thoughts of maternal thinkers who foreground maternal subjectivity and ways of thinking that provide depth of meaning to my own personal lived experience. As mentioned, I have in particular drawn from Kristeva whose body of thought returns eternally to the maternal cosmos, “pregnant with madness and sublimity” (Kristeva, 2005, p. 6). I advocate Kristeva’s consistent demand for a re-evaluation and better understanding of the maternal in culture to facilitate unique opportunities for subjectivity. As such, I have looked to find indicators of Kristeva’s arresting ideas in the works of other maternal photographers whose work I engage with in the next section of the thesis.

In Chapter Two, 'Defining the maternal photographer and a maternal approach', I explain my reasons for choosing to examine mostly the photographs of biological mothers in this research. I acknowledge that not all women opt for motherhood and that it is possible for the maternal function to be undertaken by those other than the biological mother. Sara Ruddick (1995) develops a theory of 'maternal thinking', which outlines that the maternal function can be undertaken by either male or female, disturbing gender essentialism. Nonetheless, while I appreciate that the work of mothering is separate from the identity of the mother, my focus on the biological mother as photographer is motivated by my 'bodily' experience of maternity. In this section I also reflect on the influence of feminism and how feminist strategies may be incorporated in the photograph to disrupt easy viewing. Furthermore, I argue that photography is a useful apparatus to introduce mutual recognition between mother and child, even though, as Hirsch (1997, p. 154) maintains, social scrutiny of the maternal photographer is fiercely observed.

Then I analyse the canon of maternal photography and note the inequities that have historically limited women, in particular maternal photographers, in art institutions and the wider cultural domain. Specifically I discuss the works of maternal photographers Clementina Hawarden, Elinor Carucci and Edith Maybin whose works I believe:

- Reveal Kristeva's maternal passion and the semiotic—the coexistence of beauty and menace, ambivalence, perversion, fetish and the abject
- Depict mutual recognition through the maternal gaze—interrelation of processes of looking between mother photographer and child; and
- Reference Liss's (2009, p. xv11) statement that "strategies of feminist motherhood in visual culture and in life set out to embarrass traditional maternal qualities such as caring, empathy and sacrifice, to displace them."

Images of children by maternal photographers, such as Hawarden, Carrucci and Maybin, impart complicated visions of childhood to counter traditional representations that construct the child and childhood as innocent. In the third chapter of this thesis, 'It won't come smooth: childhood photography and the construction of the child', I contend that the ideal of childhood innocence is an adult fantasy that can have negative consequences for the child. According to Kincaid (1992), James, Jenks and Prout (1998) and Higonnet (2002) the limiting Romantic notion of childhood innocence, which emerged in the eighteenth century, marks the child as vulnerable and weak. I explore the social construction of childhood innocence and the contribution of photography to manufactured ideas about children's differences to adults and childhood idylls.

Childhood, since the invention of photography and especially in contemporary Western culture, holds a strange fascination for the professional, amateur and family photographer. Indeed, Jacqueline Miller (2010, p. 2) points out that, “no childhood goes undocumented now.” There is an archive of imagery which constitutes childhood as naïve and powerless. In this chapter I argue that maternal photographers re-imagine the child through the lens of the complex maternal relationship. Carol Mavor (1996), Carol Armstrong (1998) and Anne Higonnet (1998) concur that depictions of unfamiliar childhoods referencing the maternal relationship challenge conventional restrictive notions about the child and instead provide the opportunity for new, liberating and subjective interpretations of individual and collective childhood. I concur with Joanne Faulkner (2011, p. 52) who says:

the photograph also engages a critical relation to the fantasy of childhood innocence, by revealing its uncanny, horrifying aspect: the desire through which the perceived ‘reality’ of childhood is established. Those who most *desire* ‘innocence’ conceived as fetishised vulnerability are likely to be extremely confronted by what the photograph reveals about this desire.

Incisive images of children by photographers who utilise a maternal approach reflect the unstable ideal of childhood innocence and instead portray innocence as a social chimera. Such images refuse to contribute to the ideal of childhood innocence — an adult prescription for childhood that fails to accommodate the agency of the child and promotes the child as essentially vulnerable and therefore at risk. I propose, like Faulkner, that images, which question innocence as an idyll, demand an acknowledgement of the adult yearning for childhood innocence. They then may assist a considered discussion and facilitate a measured understanding of the uncertainty of childhood images that has been lacking in the public debate thus far.

In the fourth chapter, titled ‘Controversy’, I examine the recent rows involving portrayals of children in art photography that have arisen in Australia since photographer/artist Connie Petrillo’s Perth arrest in 1995. I reflect on the 2008 Bill Henson case, which has instigated increased censorship and considerable changes to and restrictions on artists who choose to include the child subject. I also reference similar controversies involving maternal photographers such as Sally Mann (US) and Tierney Gearon (UK). In particular, I consider that, as Australian academics Denise Ferris (2005) and Rex Butler (2008) argue, there exists considerable public anxiety about images of children by maternal photographers. Subsequently, public reactions to representations that create a discourse on maternal passion are fearful and the photographs are often condemned as obscene. However, according to Butler (2008, p. 5) “the ultimate obscenity in our culture... is the love between mother and child.” Hence, I argue that the outrage that ensues from images taken by maternal photographers, which feature a direct visual connection and reciprocity of intensity

between mother and child, reflects an impotent engagement with maternal passion of Western culture.

The moral panic that surrounds complicated photographs of children has introduced restrictive practices and protocols, which increasingly work to erase visual encounters with the maternal relationship. The time and cost restrictions of submitting images, which may potentially offend, for Classification have seen publications reluctant to publish and institutions unwilling to exhibit even pallid visions of children. Failure to submit photographs for classification, according to Arts Law Centre of Australia (2011, p. 7):

carries a certain amount of risk for the artist, particularly in light of the Bill Henson controversy in 2008 over artistic photographs of naked or semi-naked children. Despite all the controversy, the photographs submitted for classification to the Classification Board were ultimately given a PG rating.

I suggest that maternal photographers struggle to maintain an engagement with maternity, which encompasses the agency of the child despite the challenges of censorship.

In the final chapter a discussion of my own photographic practice and maternal approach, which incorporates Kristeva's 'herethics' and Allmark's feminist method *photographie féminine* concludes this exegesis. Both 'herethics' and *photographie féminine* declare a maternally influenced openness to difference and an ethical model which I suggest is also revealed in *Uncertain surrenders*. Moreover, I examine here the importance of Kristeva's (1984) notion of the *chora*, as a shared world of new beginnings between mother and child. I also argue that photography and maternal passion are uneasy but dynamic bedfellows that thrive on ambiguity and facilitate mutual recognition. Indeed, I cite Barthes, whose thinking about photography in *Camera Lucida* (2000) remains compelling with his connection of the maternal body and photography. I describe the implications of theory which tells in *Uncertain surrenders* of the intimacy between my children and myself facilitated by the photographic process.

This research then, begun in uncertainty, develops a discussion of maternal passion through the 'shareable world' of photography in the hope of creating an opportunity for Melanie Klein's maternal return (return to the maternal). Acknowledgement of the 'mother photographer' in this research is utilised to broaden the scope of female subjectivity, increase the status of motherhood, and to agitate conventional restrictive notions of motherhood that persist a decade into the twenty-first century.

Chapter One

Theorising the maternal: Acknowledging different and difficult deliveries

Particular theories, specifically those about the maternal in psychoanalytic feminist writing, have influenced this creative maternal inquiry. The discourse, which envelops the maternal in psychoanalysis and feminism, is not singular; instead it is a complex and diverse theoretical rotation that continues to gestate. Nevertheless, Julia Kristeva maintains that psychoanalysis post-Freud and subsequent Lacanian theory has overinvested in the “paternal function” at the expense of the maternal. She states, “what we lack is a reflection on maternal passion... Philosophers and psychoanalysts seem less inspired by the ‘maternal function’, perhaps because it is not a function but more precisely a *passion*” (Kristeva, 2005, p. 1). The significance of Kristeva’s own maternal discourse is confirmed by Kelly Oliver (1991, p. 51) who states that “through a complex conception of the maternal function, Kristeva provides ... an alternative discourse of maternity. Her recuperated maternal function provides a support for both mother and child.” This chapter redresses the absence of the recognition, discussion and representation of a complex maternal in culture and delivers the prolific tenets of the theoretical perspectives, in particular those of Julia Kristeva, that trace the reconception of the maternal in psychoanalysis. Here, necessarily, it is all about mothers and a maternal delivery.

The incorporation of psychoanalytic thought in feminism has been both contested and actively nurtured in feminist theory since Juliet Mitchell, in *Psychoanalysis and feminism* (1974), called for feminism to acknowledge psychoanalysis as a perspective that enables the questioning of human subjectivity, and, in particular, interrogation of the construction of sexual difference *Feminism*. Significantly, over thirty years later, Natasha Walter in her book *Living Dolls* (2010) calls for continued vigilance by feminists against the promotion of sexual inequality, expressing her dismay at the resurgence of biological determinism as a popular explanation for gender difference in the twenty – first century. Walter believes that gender stereotypes continue to be invoked as scientific fact in contemporary culture and has stated “I am very uneasy about the way that the media has sort of pounced on biological determinism as the scientific consensus, when it isn’t.” Similarly, Toril Moi (1987, p. 4) maintains that sexual difference is at the core of any feminist ontology, asserting, “the question is what that difference consists in, how far it extends, and how it is constructed in relation to power.” Appreciably, then, the labouring of psychoanalysis in contemporary feminist thought can provide an understanding of how power circulates in Western culture according to sexual difference. Furthermore, the incorporation of psychoanalysis in feminist thought signals a

point of departure from the limitations imposed on women by patriarchal culture and the worn— out assumptions of that power, based on sexual difference, which continues to circulate into the twenty— first century.

Despite their differences, Mitchell (1974), Chodorow (1978), Grosz (1990, p. 2) and Weedon (1999, p. 77) concur that many feminists have appropriated psychoanalysis because it is a perspective that allows a questioning of the construction of sexual difference and human subjectivity, which is not independent of an assumption of a natural biological difference, rather, figuring difference, as a psychic and social construction. Mitchell (cited in Rose, 2005, p. 6) states, “the particular task of psychoanalysis is to decipher how we acquire our heritage of the ideas and laws of human society within the human mind.” Whereas many feminists have interpreted Freud’s thoughts as an affirmation of patriarchally prescribed sex roles, Grosz (1990, p. 19) reminds us that “Freud was not prescribing what women and femininity should be, but describing what patriarchal culture demands of women and femininity.” Thus Freud’s discoveries allowed sexual difference to be explicated free of biological determinism.

Kristeva’s revisiting of Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis, which I will gloss in the next section, can still be utilised as a critical lever, particularly in maternal creative endeavours, to dismantle a heritage that continues to privilege the male over the female in Western culture according to biological difference. Kristeva’s (2001, p. 10) statement that “psychoanalysis begins by recognizing the psychic bisexuality endemic to each of the two biologically constituted sexes, and it concludes by revealing the sexual uniqueness of us all,” indicates the level of subjective emancipation the study of psychoanalysis can facilitate. Nonetheless, French feminist psychoanalytic theorists, such as Irigaray, Cixous and, in particular, Kristeva, who attempt to reinvigorate the maternal in their writing, are often criticised and categorised as essentialist because of their attention to the maternal function.

The double bind that the maternal represents has been actively debated in feminist scholarship because, as Rosi Braidotti (1989, p. 96) points out, “motherhood is seen as both one of the pillars of patriarchal domination of women and one of the strongholds of female identity.” Furthermore, Elizabeth Wright (1993, p. 252) agrees that accounting for the maternal has proved problematic for feminism and psychoanalytic discourse alike when she says, “neither psychoanalysis nor feminism has comfortably been able to assume a maternal voice. In psychoanalytic theories, the child is the subject of the study.” Nevertheless, practicing psychoanalytic psychotherapist Rozsika Parker counters this imbalance in her book, *Torn in two* (2005), which permits space for a maternal subject through a re-figuration of ambivalence from the mother’s position.

I believe that to reinvigorate the maternal as a complex subject has the power to facilitate subjective exploration for all. By embracing the maternal subject as problematic, psychoanalysis and feminist study deny a universalising of the mother as a stable subject and thus promote emancipatory potential. It is crucial to acknowledge that “the mother’s subjectivity, her ability to reflect on and speak of her experience, has become an important ingredient in altering myths and changing social reality” (Bassin, Honey& Kaplan, 1994, p. 3). I also accept, however, that “because theory is developed from an array of perspectives different theories can potentially provide very different explanations for the same set of circumstances” (Gray, 2008, p. 85). Not all mothers, feminists, or all woman share the exact beliefs, values or feelings regarding their own gendered subjectivity, especially in relationship to the maternal. For example, Kristeva and Irigaray both disavow feminism despite being frequently described in literature as French feminists. Irigaray (2008, p. 74) states, “ I have repeated that I do not want to belong to any ‘ism’ category, be it feminism, post feminism, post modernism etc.” Kristeva (cited in Moi, 1987, p. 114), has also systematically distanced herself from what she perceives as the totalising sweep of feminism when she explains, “I am in favour of a concept of femininity which would take as many forms as there are women. That does not produce a ‘group’ – effect becoming dogmatic.” Grosz (1989, p.96) articulates Kristeva’s position on feminism thus:

Feminism, for her, is not really a movement about a category, class or caste of women at all: it is a movement about the collectivity of individuals with unique specific combinations of masculine and feminine, a movement about the liberation of the subject.

I suggest assigning women a singular category instead of exploring their singularities is problematic. Daphne Patai (1991, p. 144) adds further caution when she states, “ in a world divided by race, ethnicity, and class, the purported solidarity of female identity is in many ways a fraud.” Therefore, the incorporation of theories from a Western feminist recount of psychoanalysis, which reflects a white middle-class approach to sexual difference, is not representative of all women’s experience in relation to the maternal. Furthermore, Weedon (1999, p. 95) comments, “a major critique of feminist appropriations of post-Freudian and post-Lacanian psychoanalysis has come from feminist queer theory which rejects what Judith Butler calls the ‘heterosexual matrix’.” Kristeva (2001, p 10) counters criticisms of psychoanalysis as promoting heterosexuality, defending it as a device for an analysis of individual and unique options for sexuality when she says:

Psychoanalysis begins by recognizing the psychic bisexuality endemic to each of the two biologically constituted sexes, and it concludes by revealing the sexual uniqueness of us all. Thus, although most analytical schools of thought assert that the heterosexuality that founds the family is the only form of sexuality to guarantee the subjective individuation of children, psychoanalysis explores and recognizes a sexual polymorphism beneath all types of sexual identity, and relies

on that recognition when it holds itself out as an ethics of subjective emancipation.

The criticism by queer theorists of the normalisation of heterosexuality in psychoanalysis via the ratification of the Oedipal complex in Freud's thought and entrance into the 'Symbolic' 'Law of the Father' in Lacan's mirror phase, is refuted by Kristeva when she destabilises the idea of a unified subject through an engagement with the maternal body, which moves between nature and culture. Kelly Oliver (1998, p. 3) agrees: "Kristeva uses the maternal body with its two-in-one, or other within, as a model of subjective relations. Like the maternal body, each one of us is what she calls a subject in process." I will discuss in greater detail Kristeva's retelling of Freud and Lacan and her postulation that we are all subjects-in-process in the following section of this chapter.

The maternal body and maternal passion share in the ambiguous and according to Kristeva (2005, p. 2) "there is no other way to accompany the bio-physiological, economic and ideological ordeals of motherhood ...than to come to terms with this passion's ambiguities." Consequently, some arguments on the maternal I incorporate may appear problematic and contradictory at times, but I rather like to think of any tense ambiguities that result from fluid ideas as theoretical dilations, which facilitate open interpretations. Importantly, Kristeva (2001, p. 13) recalls Melanie Klein's theoretical approach, which is conceptually complex, when she states of Klein, "all of our author's notions prove to be ambiguous, ambivalent, and reflective of logical processes that are more circular than dialectical." This way of theorising is, I believe, more aligned to the maternal than paternal way of thinking, an approach that I embrace in this research. I note the uncertainty that arises from categorising women according to difference, though I celebrate the potential of a positioning "woman" to provide a space from which we might collectively, through a denial of containment, agitate the boundaries of the symbolic. Kristeva (1980, p. 146) states:

It is probably necessary to be a woman (ultimate guarantee of sociality beyond the wreckage of the paternal symbolic function, as well as the inexhaustible generator of its renewal, of its expansion) not to renounce theoretical reason but to compel it to increase its power by giving it an object beyond its limits.

Understandably, there remains some fear that emphasis on the maternal has the potential to promote the limiting patriarchal construction of woman as chained to her biology, and therefore confines them to a certain destiny of maternity that may remain outside of many women's desire. Kristeva's (2005, p. 2) belief that "motherhood is not an 'instinct' and that it cannot be reduced to a "desire to have a child". What about the desire not to have a child? Rather it is a reconquest that lasts a lifetime and beyond." This suggests that Kristeva believes the maternal relationship is not simply a biological possibility and she confirms this when she states that women can live out, and bear out, a maternal relationship without gestation and giving birth in areas like "teaching, community work and long-term relationships." Adria Schwartz (1994 p. 252) agrees that "in our

culture mothers/mothering no longer universally signifies a woman's biological relation to her child." However, in this research my definition of the maternal "before the invention of an artificial uterus ... generally concerns mothers and remains the prototype of the love relationship" (Kristeva, 2005, p. 3). Therefore, while I briefly touch on fathers who photograph their children with a maternal sensibility and I accept that the maternal relationship can exceed a birthing connection, for the purposes of this research I am primarily concerned with biological mothers, such as myself, who photograph their own children.

Fear of tying women to the restrictive notions of sexual difference based on biology by focusing on the maternal can be overcome. As Wright (1992, p. 253) reminds us, "this need not be so, if maternity is historicized and politicized from within feminism and if maternal voices are heard." It is imperative for mothers to claim their own subjectivity, to indulge in reverie and develop new possibilities for female subjectivity in the social and cultural, as well as the personal, realm. Mothers must be able to explore their own subjectivity so they can pass on greater opportunities for subjective discovery for their daughters and sons. Grosz (1989, p. 119) distills Irigaray's idea of the mother– daughter relationship when she says "until the mother can be seen as a woman, the daughter does not have the basis for a feminine identity." Anxiety should stem from a lack of maternal discourse in contemporary life, rather than an overinvestment.

More about mothers: Kristeva refiguring Freud and Lacan

"Maternity is probably the most central and sustained object of Kristeva's investigations" (Grosz 1989, p. 78). 'In Motherhood today' Julia Kristeva (2005) demonstrates the term of her dedication to maternity when she laments that modern culture is deficient in a complex discourse on maternity that reflects on "maternal passion". "By turning all our attention on the biological and social aspects of motherhood as well as on sexual freedom and equality, we have become the first civilization which lacks a discourse on the complexity of motherhood" (Kristeva, 2005, p. 6). Indeed Oliver (1998, p. 2) supports Kristeva's call for "a new discourse on maternity that acknowledges the importance of the maternal function in the development of subjectivity and in culture." Kristeva's call has been sustained over thirty years; in 'Stabat Mater', *Tales of Love*, 'Motherhood According to Bellini', *Desire in Language*, *Melanie Klein* and 'Motherhood Today'. I engage with Kristeva's recent appeal regarding maternal passion later in this chapter, but first I discuss the ways that she has previously refigured the maternal with a revision of Freudian and Lacanian theories of sexual difference, emphasising the pre-Oedipal maternal semiotic relationship between mother and child. This will be followed by a discussion on Kristeva's incorporation of Melanie Klein's development of the maternal in psychoanalytic theory.

Kristeva's interest in Freud's observations on the psychology of the unconscious and human sexuality is well documented and rigorous. Furthermore, as Wright (1992, p. 194) also claims, "Kristeva's writings focus on the point of overlap between psychoanalysis and semiotics (study of language not Kristeva's pre symbolic semiotic in this instance), the notion of the speaking subject ... as a speaking meaning producing and meaning deforming desiring being." Kristeva asserts in her work that the maternal function within Freudian psychoanalysis is grossly underplayed when she states, "the fact remains, as far as the complexities and pitfalls of maternal experience are involved, that Freud offers only a massive nothing" (Kristeva, 1986, p. 179). Wright (1992, p. 291) agrees with Kristeva that the mother is marginalised in Freud's schemata of the Oedipal complex and that patriarchal law is enshrined as the normative and universally accepted rule that governs psychosexual development.

In his essay titled, 'The development of the libido and sexual organizations', Freud (1973, p. 380) posits that to enter the social community a child must first renounce his [sic] the Oedipal longings: "for the son this task consists in detaching his libidinal wishes from his mother...reconciling himself with his father ...these tasks are set to everyone." Once the son finds a love-object outside of the Oedipal triangle he is able to release himself from the authority of his father and take up his own position of privilege within the patriarchal structure. The ratification of the Oedipal complex is, however, more complicated for the female child and also given little investigation by Freud who is most concerned with the authority of the paternal function in his analysis. Mitchell (cited in Doane & Hodges, 1992, p. 40) describes the asymmetry of Freud's Oedipal phase when she states that in:

The Oedipus complex... the little boy learns his place as the heir to this law of the father and the little girl learns her place within it...Freud always opposed any idea of symmetry in the cultural 'making' of men and women. A myth for women would have to bear most dominantly the marks of the Oedipus complex because it is a man's world into which a woman enters; complementary or parallelism are out of the question.

Fear of castration supposedly forces the male child to let go of the mother as a love object and ensures the closure of the Oedipal complex, which results in the formation of the conscience-producing super-ego, which accepts the rule of the Father. Subsequently, movement into the Symbolic patriarchal structure is ensured for the male child. The female child has a more complex Oedipal struggle, according to Freud in his essay 'Female Sexuality' (cited in Saguaro, 2000, p. 23), because she is caught in the double bind of necessarily having to choose the father as a libidinal object over her intense, prior, same-sex mother-love object. Freud concludes, "thus in women the Oedipus complex is the end-result of a fairly lengthy development." Freud's discoveries on the dramas of sexual difference, according to Saguaro (2000, p. 19) remain resonant and

worthy of recognition as a means to problematise and agitate the cultural bias towards the masculine.

Following on from, yet distinct from, Freud, Lacan also invests heavily in the articulation of the dominant paternal function. Lacan “evolved new theories about how being is constituted, how language is acquired, how the SEXUAL DIFFERENCE is constituted” (Wright, 1992, p. 202). Psychosexual development for Lacan is dependent on the recognition and acquisition of language that follows a particular model of development. An important developmental stage for Lacan is what he defines as the ‘mirror stage’, which occurs in the infant anywhere between six and eighteen months of age. Lacan states in *Ecrits* (2001, p. 1) that this stage releases a ‘libidinal dynamism’ which can best be understood thus: “the mirror as an identification, in the full sense that analysis gives to the term: namely the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image” (Lacan, 2001, p.1). This fragmented phase of unease marks the recognition/misrecognition of the self as ‘I’; in other words, an unstable and confused identity. Grosz (1990, p. 39) explains Lacan’s assertion that the child “is now enmeshed in a system of confused recognition/misrecognition: it sees an image of itself that is both accurate ... as well as delusory.... It is the dual, ambivalent relation to its own image that is central to Lacan’s account of subjectivity.” This divided sense of identity, the sense of me/not me, that occurs in the ‘mirror stage’ contributes to an understanding of the struggle for self as a socially constituted subject, and situates the child in what Lacan names the Imaginary.

Lacan proposes that after the shattering ‘mirror stage’ the acquisition of language that occurs between eighteen months and four years for the child ensures the child’s entrance into the Symbolic order. Entrance into the masculinised linguistic system is influenced by gender difference and once here the subject remains as an ever —situated ‘I’ within the field of the Other (Grosz, 1990, p79). Bruce Fink (1997, pp. xi-xii) states, “Lacan defines the subject as a position adopted with respect to the Other as language or law; in other words, the subject is a relationship to the Symbolic order.” Ascent into the symbolic order or ‘Law of the Father’ via the acquisition of language once again privileges the paternal function and echoes the Oedipal complex in its denial of the maternal. Indeed, Helene Cixous in ‘Castration or decapitation’ (cited in Oliver, 2000, p. 279) states, we are subjected to language, which lays down its law and we are “seized by a certain kind of masculine desire, the desire that mobilizes philosophical discourse... we are already caught up in masculine interrogation” (cited in Oliver, 2000, p.279). Furthermore as Wright (1992, pp. 252-253) agrees, for Lacan, language itself is the name of the Father; acceding to the Symbolic means transcending maternal silence and the mother’s materiality. The articulation of a maternal voice thus remains an impossibility.” Like Freud, Lacan fails to conceive the significance of the maternal in the development of subjectivity through language and culture. This oversight left space for the

French psychoanalytic, feminist trio Helene Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva to later deviate from patriarchal psychoanalytic theories that privilege male subjectivity.

Kristeva (1986, p. 205) acknowledges the difficulty of expressing a clear, scientific, structured maternal voice within the Symbolic when she repeats:

Lacan's scandalous sentence 'There is no such thing as Woman'." Indeed, she does not exist with a capital 'W', possessor of some mythical unity- a supreme power, on which based the terror of power and terrorism as the desire for power. But what an unbelievable force for subversion in the modern world! And at the same time, what playing with fire!

Indeed, as Campbell (2000, p. 102) expands, "the notion of women's language, women speaking from a maternal rather than paternal place, raises difficulties." Campbell (2000, p. 102) explains that the woman is placed either outside of language in the pre-Oedipal or within language always at the risk of restating the phallus. Nevertheless, Kristeva's maternal revolt against Lacan's premature dismissal of the maternal becomes apparent when she invests more readily in the maternal with an assertion that the symbolic can never suppress the maternal function. Kristeva believes that "the sublation of the maternal site in the paternal metaphor operated by language ... the isolation of the symbolic from the imaginary retraced by Lacan in the ideal Oedipal triangle, is never perfect" (1986, p. 229). Kristeva then rallies against the silencing of the maternal voice and disfiguring of the maternal in patriarchy by bringing the maternal body back into language.

Oliver (1998, p. 2), Lechte and Margaroni (2004, p. 14) and Elliot (2007, p. 123) all concur that by recalling the maternal body, Kristeva establishes an 'ordering' or regulating principle, which contributes to psychic subject formation before the paternal law put forward by Freud or Lacan's 'Law of the Father'. As Anthony Elliot (2007, p. 123) points out, "whereas Freudians and Lacanians view the regulation of the self in terms of rationality or structure, Kristeva emphasizes the importance of the body to the constitution of the self." Oliver (1998, p. 2) agrees that "Kristeva argues that maternal regulation is the law before the Law, before paternal Law," though Lechte and Margaroni (2004, p.14) clarify that, maternal regulation "(as Kristeva reminds us) is not a law, though it is informed by 'socio-historical constraints'" but is instead a 'principle of ordering.' It is important to note that the return to the maternal body has been driven not only by Kristeva but that "the French feminists have all in different ways explored how a poetic unconscious relation to the maternal body can actually challenge the repressive masculine domain of the symbolic order" (Campbell, 2000, p. 102). However, it is the subversive potential of Kristeva's recalling of the maternal body in her ideas on the semiotic, the *chora* and the abject in creative endeavors that is crucial to this research.

Kristeva's semiotic and the *chora*

Kristeva reinvigorates the significance of maternity when she articulates the contribution of the maternal body, the pre-Oedipal, and the grist of the semiotic in language to the formation of the psychic subject. According to Kelly Oliver (1998, p.1), Kristeva's distinction between the "semiotic" and the "symbolic" "maintains that all signification is composed of two elements, the symbolic and the semiotic." Distinct from Lacan's Symbolic, the symbolic to which Kristeva refers is concerned with the grammar and structuring component of language, while the semiotic is aligned with rhythmic bodily tones. It is the "dialectical oscillation between the semiotic and the symbolic that makes signification possible" (Oliver 1998, p. 80). Lechte and Margaroni (2004, p. 14) maintain it is important to distinguish the difference between Kristeva's "symbolic" and Lacan's "Symbolic" because the "symbolic" forms a dialectic with the semiotic which results in the formation of the "Symbolic". According to Lechte and Margoloni (2004, p. 14) "the 'symbolic' [is] the signifying modality that op/poses the semiotic from the 'Symbolic' which is the outcome of the dialectic between the two modalities." Kristeva (1997, p. 34) summarises the interrelationship of the semiotic and symbolic in the signifying practice of language when she states that "these two modalities are inseparable within the signifying process which constitutes language, and the dialectic between them determines the type of discourse." Hence different modes of language such as theory, poetry, narrative and others, are distinguished according to different combinations and articulations of the semiotic and the symbolic.

Signification, then, is reliant on a fusion of both the maternal semiotic and the paternal symbolic, and Kristeva's attention to the interdependence of the two refuses to negate the significance of the maternal in signifying practice in the subject's psychic formation, a significance previously overlooked by Freud and Lacan. Kristeva (1997, p. 34) states that, like language, "the subject is always *both* semiotic *and* symbolic, no signifying system he produces can be either 'exclusively' semiotic or 'exclusively' symbolic, and is instead necessarily marked by an indebtedness to both." Kristeva demonstrates a play between the two modalities of the semiotic and the symbolic in signifying practice throughout *Stabat Mater*. Here Kristeva divides the page contrasting her private and passionate experience of maternity on the left with a more rational, scientific symbolic account on the right. Significantly, the incorporation of the semiotic allows Kristeva to agitate the boundaries of the unified symbolic which has the potential to disrupt a cohesive patriarchal vision of the maternal by offering her own 'unnameable', ecstatic maternal utterance.

In *Stabat Mater* Kristeva's unsettling of the symbolic subsequently destabilises the Symbolic. According to Wright (1992, p. 253), 'In *Stabat Mater*, a text with two voices, one theoretical, the other disruptive, personal, marginal, Julia Kristeva (1986) experimentally writes the maternal. As

the semiotic, pre-Symbolic voice of the PRE-OEDIPAL, this pre-linguistic maternal voice becomes in Kristeva's writings a privileged space of dissidence and subversion." Elliot (2007, p. 122) agrees that Kristeva transgresses conventional paternal boundaries in *Stabat Mater* and moreover maintains that by dividing her narrative, Kristeva also emphasises the complexities and contradictions that exist between a patriarchal ideal of maternity and the authentic experience. Elliot (2007, p. 122) states within *Stabat Mater*, "most importantly she [Kristeva] argues that splitting itself defines the maternal experience." This radical paradox of the maternal experience, the two-in-one-ness of the maternal body noted by Kristeva leads to her postulation of "subjects in process" which I will discuss in further detail later in this section.

Departure from, and resistance to, a stable unified paternal symbolic is fortified with a maternal recovery via a remembrance of the semiotic *chora* delivered by Kristeva. For her "what remodels the symbolic order is always the influx of the semiotic" (Kristeva 1986, p. 113). Kristeva's notion of the "semiotic" is opposed to the structured symbolic and is rather aligned with the unspoken and unrepresented conditions of signification which are enmeshed with the maternal. According to Grosz, (1989, p. 43) Kristeva's semiotic "refers to the energies, rhythms, forces and corporeal residues necessary for representation." Kristeva describes the semiotic as "distinctive mark, trace, index, precursory sign, proof, engraved or written sign, imprint, trace, figuration" (1984, p. 25). The energy and motion of the semiotic precedes the symbolic and prepares a "strange place where drives hold sway" (Kristeva, 1982, p. 14). This place Kristeva names after Plato the "*chora*". Kristeva (1980, p. 133) explains that, "Plato's *Timeus* speaks of a *chora*, *receptacle*, unnameable, improbable, anterior to naming, to the One, to the father, and consequently, maternally connoted." The spatial *chora*, then, is linked to maternal body impulses, drives, pre-language. It surrounds the entangled intimacy of the mother/child dyad and reveals the maternal body as a site of conflicting desires.

Kristeva's notion of the *chora* is of particular significance to this research and will be explicated further in the final chapter, where I discuss maternal photography and my own work in connection with Kristeva's ideas on the semiotic relationship between mother and child via the *chora*. The *chora* is an undeclared, undifferentiated corporeal space that, entwined, the mother and child share. The *chora* cannot be ordered and, like the unstable maternal body, threatens the stability of the Symbolic. "The *chora*, as rupture and articulations (rhythm), precedes evidence, verisimilitude, spatiality and temporality. Our discourse- all discourse- moves with and against the *chora*... it simultaneously depends and refuses it ... the *chora* can ... never be definitely posited" (Kristeva, 1986, p. 94). The *chora* is pivotal to this creative research because as Kristeva (1986, p. 115) impresses "the very practice of art necessitates reinvesting the maternal *chora* so that it transgresses the symbolic order." Bringing back the crisis of the maternal body via the semiotic

chora in art, therefore allows for a crisis of meaning for subjectivity, which in turn allows for subversive questionings and opportunities for the subject through both the construction and representations of the work.

The acknowledgment of the crisis of the maternal body, its relation to the semiotic *chora* and subversive creative practice put forward by Kristeva has not been entirely embraced by feminist writers. As Lechte and Margaroni (2004, 24) assert, Kristeva's "association of the maternal body with the semiotic *chora* has been repeatedly attacked for its essentialization with the mother who is ultimately marginalized from language and the realm of politics." Indeed, Michelle Boulous Walker concurs that Ewa Ziarek (1992, p. 91-108) also isolates other feminist critics, such as "Silverman, Jones, Rose, Kuykendall, Grosz and Butler ... who argue that Kristeva's transgressions rely on a conception of the maternal that ultimately silences the feminine in the symbolic." (1998, p. 124)

Furthermore, Campbell (2000, p. 103) believes that Kristeva's use of the semiotic is problematic because it restates the Oedipal division and essentially assigns women to mothering which leaves the world of language and culture reserved for men. In contrast, Boulous Walker (1998, p. 126) believes that though Kristeva's writing is ambiguous and encourages contradictory readings that do not adequately challenge politically the privileging of masculinised language, nonetheless her "work on the maternal and language does open new conceptual terrain. It does challenge many of the somatophobic tendencies underpinning existing theories of the subject." In addition, it is also Kristeva's writing on the abject and its alliance with maternal body illuminates the forces of oppression involved in subjective psychic formation.

The maternal abject

In *Powers of horror* (1982) Kristeva develops a theory of the abject that is committed to the maternal pre-Oedipal relationship (for it is with the maternal that the abject is most connected), concerned with the fragility of stable subjectivity and bodily boundaries; and pronounces the threat of the abject to subjective unity promised by a paternal symbolic, thereby facilitating the transgression of the symbolic order. Kristeva's version of the abject is closely attached to the semiotic and as Grosz (1989, p. 71) asserts, "abjection attests to the always tenuous nature of the symbolic order in the face of a series of dispersing semiotic drives." Moreover, according to Kristeva (1982, p. 13), the maternal body sets up a crisis for identity even before the separation of childbirth:

The abject confronts us ... within our personal archaeology, with our earliest attempts to release the hold of the maternal entity even before existing outside of

her...It is a violent clumsy breaking away, with the constant risk of falling back under the sway of a power as securing as it is stifling.

Signaling an unstable authentication of identity because it is, like the maternal body, a borderline state, the abject, as Wright (1992, p. 198) articulates, is neither subject nor object, which therefore throws the viability of each into question. "Unflaggingly, like an inescapable boomerang, a vortex of summons and repulsions places the one haunted by it literally beside himself" (Kristeva, 1982, p. 1). The collapse of the category of self and other brought on by the abject is most notable in the maternal because it simultaneously beckons and repels. Moreover, according to Grosz (1989, p. 79), like "the abject maternity is the splitting, fusing, merging, fragmenting of a series of bodily processes outside the will or control of the subject." Significantly Kelly Oliver (1998, p. 60) reminds us that though painful "human life, human society, is founded on the abject separation of one body from another at birth, a separation, like subsequent ones, that is labored but necessary." The abject is palpable through gestation, pregnancy, and birth, from morning sickness to breastfeeding and beyond; the abject is embedded in the maternal; it marks the threshold of existence and disrupts the unity of the subject.

Kristeva's writings on the abject document an intimate companionship with the perverse and the artistic. "The abject is perverse because it neither gives up nor assumes a prohibition, a rule, or a law; but turns them aside, misleads, corrupts; uses them, takes advantage of them, the better to deny them (Kristeva, 1982, p. 15). Representations of the maternal abject and the perverse in art provide exciting possibilities for subversive readings and tender fertile potential for social transgression. Boulous Walker (1998, p. 145) states, "the catastrophe of the maternal body saves the mother from merely becoming the productive machine of symbolic representation. It effects an explosion of identity that places the mother on the other side of paternal law." Furthermore, Oliver (1998, p. 64) reminds us, "for both sexes the battle to become autonomous is a battle with the mother." The maternal body's ability to reveal the abject and the perverse, especially via its inclusion in artistic representation becomes a potent reminder of shifting subjectivity and, consequently a remarkable beacon for subversion.

The significance of the maternal body and its ability to facilitate opportunities for the construction of unique identities continues to be remarkably overlooked in cultural discourse. Walker (1998, p. 130) maintains, "women are silenced because they are radically alienated from the discourses constructing their bodies. Woman's disarticulated body remains both unspeakable and unspoken in the symbolic domain. It is the site of a contradictory and unliveable state; a body in crisis." Wright (199, p. 198) concurs when she reflects on the relevance and implications for subject formation in Kristeva's writing on the maternal body:

Kristeva clearly explains the costs and the conditions of the acquisition of culture and a Symbolic position: the subject does not develop naturally, nor is he or she merely the effects of 'conditioning' or upbringing. Rather, Symbolic subjectivity is founded on a constitutive repression (of the maternal, the *chora*, the semiotic, the object).

Andrew Cutrofello (2005, p. 197) agrees that "for Kristeva, separation from the maternal requires a repression of the semiotic as the subject now finds itself situated within a symbolic milieu."

Furthermore Kristeva (1982, p. 18) alerts us that the object is productive of culture: "'subject' and 'object' push each other away, confront each other, collapse, and start again- inseparable, contaminated, condemned, at the boundary of what is assimilable, thinkable: Great modern literature unfolds over that terrain." The continual rejection and reconstitution of the subject via the object is nowhere more powerfully expressed than through the contradictory, uncontrollable maternal body, which must be more fully incorporated into cultural discourse to nurture the potential for fluid subjectivities.

'Subject- in -process' creative possibility

The maternal body, which operates between culture and biology, denies a unified foetal or maternal subject and is therefore, according to Kristeva, the most apparent model of a "subject- in- process". "Kristeva argues that, like the maternal body, each one of us is what she calls a subject-in-process. As subjects-in-process we are always negotiating the "other" within, that which is repressed" (Anne D'Alleva 2005, p. 100). Kristeva (1986, p. 297) reveals the contradictory and complex maternal body which is "an identity, that splits, turns in on itself and changes without becoming other" to create a crisis for any notion of stable, unified possibility in subject formation. Broussard Walker (1998, p. 145) argues that "Kristeva adopts the maternal body as an emblem or metaphor of the subject's ambivalent positioning." Furthermore, Oliver (1998, p. 3) postulates that, as with the "maternal body, each one of us is what she calls a subject in process. As subjects-in-process we are always negotiating the subject within ... like the maternal body, we are never completely the subjects of our own experience." Significantly then, the subject-in-process, like the maternal body, is an unsettled divided site, which exemplifies contradiction.

The notion of subject -in -process enmeshed in the crisis of the maternal body allows a process which "positions the subject in a transgressive relation with the symbolic, thus subject and society collide and re-collide in an endless play of movement" (Broussard Walker 1998, p. 107). The maternal body refuses the illusion of unity gained in the mirror phase and therefore makes possible resistance through vulnerability and rupture. "Kristeva uses the maternal body, with its two-in-one structure, or 'other' within, as a model for all subjective relations, displacing Freud and Lacan's idea of the autonomous, unified (masculine) subject" (D'Alleva 2005, p. 100). The uncontrollable motility

of the maternal body confounds fixity or unity and reinscribes the potential for heterogeneous subjectivity via a remembering of the maternal semiotic in subject formation and in creative signifying practice. By recalling the difficult maternal body it is possible to illuminate the opportunities that being a subject-in-process affords.

Kristeva develops her notion of subjects –in- process throughout much of her writing but as Oliver (1997, p. 298) states, more specifically in “From one identity to another” and *Revolution in poetic language*. In “From one identity to another” Kristeva discusses the potential of poetic language which incorporates elements of the maternal semiotic as well as symbolic components of language to disrupt the notion of a unified subject. Poetic language according to Kristeva reactivates “this repressed instinctual, maternal element it is within the economy of signification itself that the questionable, subject in process appropriates to itself this archaic, instinctual, and maternal territory” (Oliver, 1997, p. 104). Importantly, the recognition of the semiotic maternal as well as the symbolic components of signifying practise awakens the possibility of more open opportunities for subjective formation. According to Lechte and Margaroni (2004, p. 26), “Kristeva’s subject is split because semiotic motility erupts from its speaking position, destabilizing and tendering it inhospitable to any ‘One’.” Furthermore “to remain in process is to make the transition to the symbolic without succumbing to the pretensions of an exclusively symbolic subject” (Cutrofello, 2005, p. 197). This circulating semiotic on a threshold that Kristeva names the thetic ruptures illusory subjective symbolic unity.

Antagonistic creative practice recalls the semiotic *chora* within the signifying device of language to allow psychic transcendence. According to Kristeva (2003, p. 130) “writing endures, transforming into social practice and communicable meaning this violent putting-into-process of meaning and of the subject himself.” Cutrofello (2005, p. 198) agrees with his own association between the text and the subject: “the subject in process is like a “text” whose grammatical rules are “disturbed” by the return of the semiotic... the subject in process refuses to forsake the semiotic dimension altogether.” Through rupture of the symbolic and reactivation of the repressed semiotic, creative signifying practice generates significance, refuses coherent symbolic identity and illuminates the constant flux of subjects-in-process— a becoming rather than being.

Some feminist theorists find Kristeva’s notions of the female speaking position in *Revolution in poetic language* to be less than satisfactory because it supports the notion of the feminine as excluded in signification. Indeed Kirsten Campbell, (cited in Lechte and Zournazi, 1998, p. 164) declares that Kristeva’s writing could be interpreted thus: “Kristeva’s semiotic does not describe another possibility of signification but participates in an archaic and ‘respected’ lineage of misogynistic representations of women.” However, Campbell later cites Weir (1993, p. 89), Elliot

(1991, p. 223) and Oliver (1993, p. 188) as theorists who embrace Kristeva's subject-in-process as a fitting definition for the knowing female speaking subject. Furthermore Campbell (1998, p. 167) embraces Kristeva's thought when she paraphrases that "the subject in process is therefore not an Oedipal subject but an unstable identificatory structure that is always shifting in its identifications." The idea of the shifting and permanent alterity of the subject-in-process restores the semiotic and makes possible both masculine and feminine identifications that can evade the specifics of the restrictive Law of the Father.

Of significance to my work is that creative practice and psychoanalysis, according to Kristeva (1987, p. 206), potentially "remembers abjection and filters it through the destabilised, musicalised, resensualised signs of loving discourse." Furthermore, creative practice "provides a space where new interpretations, new stories and subjectivities can be offered, resisted, negotiated, elaborated" (Joan, Kirkby cited in Lechte and Zournazi, 1998, p. 111). Kristeva's theories of the semiotic, creative practice, the *thetic* and the subject-in-process are pivotal concepts for this research and will be discussed in depth in the methodology chapter. Cutrofello (2005, p. 198) points out that in the past, "instead of refusing to cross the threshold separating the semiotic and the symbolic, avant-garde writers like Stéphane Mallarmé (1842-1898) and Comte de Lautréamont (1846-1870) achieved symbolic mastery while allowing for semiotic disruption of their discourses." Consequently they remained what Kristeva calls "subjects in process". I will discuss further the embodiment of the semiotic to disrupt the symbolic and acknowledge a debt to the maternal in the creative component of this thesis. Necessarily, the creative part of this research fosters new predilections stimulated by a maternal return via the signifying device of the photograph.

Klein: Kristeva's dissident anxious mother

Melanie Klein, mother and psychoanalyst, was the first to speak of the significance of the maternal relationship in psychoanalysis. Klein's discoveries in psychoanalysis spring from her insistence "that we think through the mother's body" (Boulous Walker, 1998, p. 141). Klein's discovery that the capacity for thought is germinated in all individuals by the maternal, overthrows Freud's insistence on the primacy of the paternal. Kristeva (2001, p. 114) draws on Klein's psychoanalytic framework to further restore the maternal function abandoned so spectacularly by Freud and Lacan because, she says, "the Kleinian universe, as had been stated to excess, is dominated by the mother." Klein developed an object relations theory alongside others, such as Ronald Fairbairn and Donald Winnicott, which focused on the child's fantasies of the maternal body. Significantly, Kristeva (2001, p. 246) states, "with Melanie Klein, the fantasy connected to the mother lies at the heart of human destiny." Moreover, Klein's clinical and theoretical findings were to become pivotal to future clinical studies and innovations on the psychic life of children that followed in her wake.

Consequently, Klein's findings and her developments on the significance of the maternal relationship make her ideas particularly significant to my research.

Kristeva's (2001) *Melanie Klein* documents the depth of meaning and influence that Klein's "genius" has contributed to Kristeva's own analytical and maternal passions. Kristeva's admiration and affection for Klein's theoretical breakthroughs and personal proclivities are clearly influenced by an attention to the mother and are therefore critical to note. Often overlooked by feminist theorists, Klein's relevance is indicated by heterogeneous and contradictory descriptions of her analytical, practical and theoretical contributions that express her complexity and power. Whether revealed as 'unhappy wife', 'depressed mother', 'rebel thinker', 'anxious dissident', or succinctly "the most original innovator, male or female, in the psychoanalytic arena" (Kristeva, 2001, p. 11). Klein's importance to Kristeva lies in the generation of knowledge grounded in maternal experience. Klein's emphasis on the maternal contribution to psychic formation runs counter to Freud's, who, "according to Kristeva, "constructed maternity in wholly patriarchal terms.... this association of motherhood with the masculine logic of Oedipus prevents the woman from voicing her own desire.... for Kristeva motherhood must be approached differently" (Elliot, 2007, p121). Kristeva (2001, p. 11) cites what she describes as Klein's "non- linear" mode of reasoning as a crucial constituent of her 'genius' and this circular, often contradictory, approach is aligned with Kristeva's own particular maternal revision in the pursuit of self- knowledge.

According to Boulding Walker (1998, p. 143), "Klein managed to capture something that Freud does not, the overwhelming importance of the mother in the period before patriarchal authority intervenes with Oedipus." Wright concurs (1992, p. 294) : "for Klein, then, the Oedipus complex does not primarily focus on the father or the penis.... It focuses rather on the mother and the breast, which are good objects if they are gratifying and bad objects if they are denying." Klein's shift from Freud was developed from her "play technique" where she psychoanalysed children at play (including her own), in order to discover a greater knowledge of the pre-Oedipal psyche. Klein's observations were developed into a theory of "positions" which describe the organization of the psyche in both child and adult alike. Key concepts of anxiety and phantasy are explored in Klein's two major "positions", which contribute to a theory of object relations. The first to be experienced by the infant is "the paranoid-schizoid position" followed by "the depressive position". Klein (1946, p p. 99-110) in 'Notes on some schizoid mechanisms', summarises the paranoid schizoid position when she establishes that anxiety in the newborn infant is experienced as 'fear of persecution', which instigates defense mechanisms, in particular, the splitting of internal and external objects and projection and introjection. The anxiety generated in the infant in this position occurs because, according to Klein, "even a happy feeding situation cannot altogether replace the prenatal unity with the mother... For the urge even in the earliest stages to get constant evidence of

the mother's love is fundamentally rooted in anxiety" (Klein 2003 p. 4). In an attempt to organise the internal chaos, which results from this anxious state, the ego splits and projects unwanted or destructive parts onto an object, which for Klein is the breast. Consequently, the mother's body is anxiously fantasised by the infant the site of its projected parts.

Klein's framework for object relations is articulated in *A study of envy and gratitude* (1956), where Klein (cited in Mitchell, 1986, p. 213) establishes as an early condition of object relations, the importance of the breast and explicates the coexistence of envy and anxiety, which ultimately facilitate the development of gratitude and happiness in the infant. Klein states:

My work has shown me that the first object to be envied is the feeding breast, for the infant feels that it possesses everything that he desires and that it has an unlimited flow of milk and love which it keeps for its own gratification. This feeling adds to his sense of grievance and hatred.

The paranoid schizoid position is related to Freud's death instinct which, according to Bion (1968, p. 141), 'is that part of the death instinct projected out toward the bad and persecuting breast while part is retained and converted into aggressive impulses which attack this breast.' Similarly the good libidinous breast is split and projected and introjected to ensure a good relationship to it. This see-sawing fantasy, according to Kristeva (2001, p. 62), both 'constructs and vacates' the self in tandem with "constructing and vacating" the Other in order to preserve the ego. The fearful and anxious state of the paranoid schizoid position in satisfactory development ideally moves forward into the depressive position (though movement back and forth between the two positions continues in adulthood). It is through the depressive position that the infant is able to better integrate its internal and external worlds and so to accept the mother as a whole object. It is significant that Klein developed her theories of the depressive position after she lost her eldest son in 1934 and Kristeva (2001, p. 74) believes "these two events – the mourning of her son and the invention of the 'depressive position' – are no doubt linked." The connection between personal loss and the development of a concept further establish Klein's ability to think via the maternal bodily experience.

Klein's depressive position begins in the infant at six months old and is an imperative precursor for the development of a satisfying relationship with the object. At this early stage the infant is able to identify with the loss of the whole mother herself, which reduces the extent of splitting and enables the mother to be perceived as a whole. Klein, (cited in Kristeva, 2001, p. 74) states "not until the object has been loved as a whole can its loss be felt as a whole." Characteristic of the depressive phase upon the realisation of potential loss of the mother are guilt and mourning. According to Hanna Segal (1982, p. 70):

At the height of his ambivalence he is exposed to depressive despair, he remembers that he has loved, and indeed still loves his mother, but feels that he has devoured or destroyed her so that she is no longer available in the external world.

The desire to make reparation to the mother after the onset of guilt in the depressive position is desirable for healthy psychic development. Kristeva (2001, p. 81) maintains that "it is through reparation that the mourning process can finally be completed." It is also significant to note that Kristeva (2001, p. 80) also adds "the pain of loss and the suffering of mourning" which facilitate reparation in the depressive position, also contribute to the creative potential offered by sublimation. Klein insists on the significance of the mother but this privilege is accompanied by the necessary antidote of destruction. According to Kristeva (2001, p. 129), "in Klein's view the cult of the mother, which is paramount, is transformed into *matricide*. The loss of the mother which for the imaginary is tantamount to the death of the mother— becomes the organizing principle for the subject's capacity." Klein's recognition of the necessity of psychic matricide as a precondition of the capacity for subjective thought is accepted by Kristeva (2001, p. 130), who acknowledges that the ultimate positive potential for subjective psychic development lies in the negativity of Klein's depressive position, Kristeva states:

Kleinian negativity, which, as we shall see, guides the drive to intelligence by way of fantasy, chooses the mother as its target; in order to think, one must first lose the mother. The paths toward this loss diverge: splitting leads us on the wrong track, whereas the depression that follows the separation/death is much more befitting. In the end, a pure positivity.... serves the capacity for love.

After matricide, the child forms the capacity to love the other and a new mother is born from recompense, reclaimed from remorse. According to Kristeva (2001, p. 246).

From one interior to the next, and from anxiety to thought: the Kleinian topography is a sublimation of the cavity, a metamorphosis of the womb, and a variation of female receptivity...the incarnate fantasy of the maternal interior becomes a way of knowing the self.

By leaving the maternal that we arrive at ourselves; through separation we deviate, and then-rediscover the potential to reclaim the maternal, through love. Kristeva (2001, p. 131) suggests that Klein recognised the potential for a rediscovery of the mother after separation:

the self never stops re-creating the mother through the very freedom it gained from being separated from her. The mother is a woman who is always renewed in images and words, through a process of which "I" am the creator simply because I am the one that restores her.

This research is underpinned by the potential Klein's thoughts on maternal separation, followed by a maternal return, present for the recognition of the intensity of the maternal bond.

Some feminist theorists find Klein's object relations theories and adherence to Freud's ideas problematic, and Wright (1992,294) explains that Klein is criticised by Benjamin (1990), Chodorow (1978) Dinnerstein (1976—for accepting “the prescribed role of the mother in the Oedipus complex.” Furthermore, Kristeva's investment in Kleinian matricide has been criticized for playing into the hands of patriarchy with its dramatic putting-the-mother-to-death plot. Janice Doane and Devon Hodges (1995, p. 6) agree that Chodorow, in particular, has described Klein's work as “instinctual determinism” and while Doane and Hodges feel that Chodorow's dismissal of Klein is simplistic, they argue “that objects- relations theory, as appropriated by Kristeva is unproductive of a feminist politics.” Doane and Hodges (1995, p. 7) also claim that object relations' emphasis on feminine identification with the maternal is repressive and promotes a unified concept of motherhood that restricts women. They believe this refusal to accommodate women's differences works blindly to promote conservative stereotypes.

Any acceptance of the shared experiences of mothers, however, does not necessarily mean that motherhood needs to be conceived, as a fixed standard, as feared by Doane and Hodges (1995). Rather, mutual maternal stories can articulate the tension of complexities and contradictions and so illuminate gaps between individuals who emerge through a collective network. Rozsika Parker (2005, p. 1) confirms this when she states that “maternal ambivalence is the experience shared variously by all mothers in which loving and hating feelings for their children exist side by side.” Parker's recognition of maternal ambivalence expands on Klein's theory of infant ambivalence when by reversing the proposition of ambivalence to accommodate a maternal perspective. Susan Rubun Sulieman (cited in Brennan, 1989, p. 145) reflects on the importance of developing Klein's theories when she states “Melanie Klein speaks with great insight about the murderous impulses the child has towards the loved mother, but has nothing to say about the reverse.” Both Kristeva in her (2005) essay 'Motherhood today' and Parker In her (2005) *Torn in two: The experience of maternal ambivalence* (2005) heed Rubun Sulieman's call to invert Klein's developmental framework, which has been criticised for situating the mother as the object of her child's needs in order to explicate the beauty and menace of ambivalence that haloes the mother.

Creatively ambivalent: Psychoanalysis a maternal passion

Kristeva's (2005) notion of maternal passion acknowledges that the violence, and ambiguity that inhabits maternity is an idea at odds with the conventional status of the mother that persists in contemporary Western culture as “a sanctuary for the sacred”. Moreover, Kristeva laments Western

society's inability to embrace a problematic maternal passion that is imbued with negativity conjoined with positivity, and to accommodate a proposition that she believes offers both risks and benefits to all. The imperative to initiate a discussion of maternal complexity is put forward by Featherstone thus: "feminist writers who avoid the complexity of mothering, who fail to hold on to their own ambivalence, will reproduce... splits and leave defensive omissions in theorising motherhood which can be readily filled by rightwing discourses" (cited in Hollway and Featherstone, 1997, p. 01). Kristeva reveals that her own maternal subjectivity is impacted upon by the social and historical dread which limits an understanding of the maternal as a "passion, pregnant, with madness and sublimity" when she openly invokes "an aspect of motherhood that concerns me personally both as a mother and a psychoanalyst: maternal passion *and its meaning today*' (2005, p. 1).

Personal acknowledgement of the conflicting dynamics of the maternal, and a lack of societal engagement with this complexity, is echoed by feminist author, psychotherapist and mother Rozsika Parker in *Torn in two: The experience of maternal ambivalence* which was first published in 1995 then revised and reissued in 2005. In an interview with *The Guardian* in October 2006, Parker affirms that her own personal experience of motherhood was crucial for her greater understanding of the full range of emotions that accompany maternity. Parker discovered that ownership of vacillating feelings through "exploring the coexistence of love and hate actually deepens our capacity to mother" (2006, p. 2). Yet Parker's acceptance of maternal ambivalence is rarely echoed in the media. In Times online (2008) psychotherapist Lucy Beresford gives an example of a popular opinion that runs counter to Parker's when she states, "maternal ambivalence is damaging for children and parent alike." Commonly, contradictory emotions are perceived as a threat to a healthy relationship between mother and child. This is because of a misunderstanding of the term ambivalence: "ambivalence is not the same as hatred or an inability to love" (Campbell, 200, p. 35), though ambivalence perceived as misanthropy perpetuates social anxieties about the ambivalent mother.

Nevertheless, Parker, with her reconsideration of ambivalence from a maternal perspective reverses Klein's 'object relations' format by shifting the focus from the child to the mother, and Kristeva, in her reckoning of maternal passion, embraces complex emotions as a creative and motivating opportunity for a more fecund relationship between mother and child. Furthermore, there are other shared ideas that emanate from both women's writing on the maternal in psychoanalysis, society and culture. Both recognise: the contribution of Melanie Klein's writing on the maternal in psychoanalytic thought; the need for the maternal to be re-evaluated in psychoanalytic theory from a maternal rather than a paternal or child standpoint; the complexity of maternal passion and the anxiety about maternal ambivalence is feared in Western culture (even in mothers); and,

significantly, that this fear stifles the potential opportunities for psychic emancipation and engagement with the potent maternal would provide. Succinctly, each woman articulates that an acknowledgement of the co-existence of love and hate feelings towards the child by the mother can result in sublimation and thus a deeper relationship with her child.

By no means a new phenomenon, maternal ambivalence continues to be examined and re-examined in both psychoanalytic theory and feminist scholarship alike. Nevertheless, the reality of maternal ambivalence remains difficult to accept as Parker cited in (Hollway and Featherstone, 1997, p. 17) attests “maternal ambivalence is curiously hard to believe in. Even while writing a book on the subject I found myself doubting its very existence.” Parker suggests that most psychoanalytic discourse views ambivalence directed towards the mother by her children as vital, yet conversely, ambivalence directed towards her children is understood to be problematic for the mother. Why maternal ambivalence is viewed as pathological needs to be examined in the interconnected arenas of the social, cultural and psychoanalytic, Parker maintains. According to Jan Campbell (2000, p. 34) maternal ambivalence has been oversimplified by some feminist scholars. Despite being addressed “in differing ways by different traditions in feminism”, she also concedes that “the feminist movement neglected mothers”.

Both Parker and Kristeva call for a re-evaluation of the potency of the maternal in psychoanalytic discourse, as well as in western society and culture. Parker (1997, p18) perceives psychoanalysis as a critical tool for an explication of maternal ambivalence, though she also recognises the need to revisit its contested territory from a maternal perspective when she states:

Some feminists have argued that psychoanalytic theory is so steeped in mother-blaming as to be unusable. I want to suggest psychoanalysis is necessary for any deep understanding of ambivalence but it is and important but we must reframe, realign and rewrite theory to illuminate this theme from a maternal perspective.

Both Parker and Kristeva maintain a spotlight on the tension between psychoanalysis and feminism with their continued discourse on maternal ambivalence. Judith Gardiner (1990, p p. 239-252) throughout her article, *In the name of the mother: Feminism, psychoanalysis, methodology*, also explores how maternal psychoanalytic theorists think and write about literature. Gardiner (1990, p. 240) agrees that the rejection of psychoanalysis by some feminists is because of its potential “patriarchal bias” but maintains that psychoanalysis can be used as a tool to de-authorize masculine master theorists like Freud and Lacan and instead re-authorize the feminist psychoanalytic critics who “analyze analysis”. Gardiner (1990, p. 244) cites feminist theorists Marianne Hirsch, Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Novy and Linda Williams as examples of maternal scholars who use psychoanalysis as a mode of explanation. Gardiner (1990, p. 244) sees these scholars as authorising a “collective or personal-as-political re-authorization in which the critic

permits herself to speak in her own voice.” Gardiner’s fusion of a personal and academic approach is similar to Kristeva’s and Parker’s, which draw from maternal psychoanalytic theorists.

Like Parker and Kristeva, Gardiner also identifies herself and the aligned theorists she cites as working against the all-powerful phallic mother but towards a maternal figure that is “a more provisional figure, unstable and divided but active and attentive” (1990, p. 244). As a maternal photographer, I am aware of the potential for myself to be classified as the superior phallic mother (because as the photographer I may be seen in a position of power which I discuss in a later chapter) but make clear that I approach this research as a maternal photographer from a position in which “the current psychoanalytic feminist critic consolidates herself as a literary authority like this mother—figure that is, like the mother who works- and who gives ‘good-enough’ mothering and who expects dialogue rather than obedience in return (Gardiner, 1990, p. 244). While I accept a position of authority I work towards an open—ended investigative, rather than fixed process with my children in the construction of the images. I give a more specific account of methods that connect the theory and practice of this research in subsequent sections.

Also as Gardiner (1990, p. 244) says, “in fields other than literary, too, feminist theorists declare how important their own maternal experience has been in shaping their intellectual perspectives and critical practices.” Kristeva and Parker agitate for maternal perspectives that create dialogues in their texts which encompass the mother as subject. It is vital to remember that maternity is not only recognised as catering to the needs of the child but also references the mother as a unique subject with her own needs. Wendy Hollway in, ‘From motherhood to maternal subjectivity’ (2001, p. 8) reminds us “mothers who are mothers are not only mothers.” This research references the impact of my maternity, but also expresses my desire to be recognised as a photographic artist. Consequently, while my maternity is critical to this inquiry, so too is my creativity, which is informed by more circumstances and considerations than maternity in isolation. My engagement with ambivalence and the complexity of maternity in psychoanalysis as part of this creative endeavour enables me to voice multiple and contradictory subject positions. These challenge traditional psychoanalytic frameworks that view mothers entirely from the perspective of the child and its needs.

The confession of negative feelings that accompany maternity is an uneasy proposition for a mother when there is “a cultural taboo surrounding female aggression, especially as a component of maternal ambivalence” (Nash 2005, p. 2). The constant tension which results from the repression of the conflicting thoughts and emotions that constitute the maternal relationship can result in feelings of alienation and what Nash (2005) describes as a cycle of “destructive passions” between mother and child. Despite the brave expositions of their own maternal ambivalence by

feminist authors such as Adrienne Rich in her critical text 1976 *Of woman born*, and an equally unflinching account of maternal anguish in *The heartache of motherhood* by Joyce Nicholson (1983), maternity remains shackled to ideas of sacrifice and fixity which are detrimental to mothers and children alike.

Boulos Walker describes *Of woman born* as a profound examination of the contrary possibilities of the maternal which run counter to fixed patriarchal ideals of a uniform motherhood, and moreover describes the publication as, a “poetic mingling of textual forms.... like the maternal body Rich’s text inhabits contradictory terrain” (1998, p. 151). Rich’s autobiographical account of motherhood remains a touchstone for any examination of maternal ambivalence in feminism and I return to Rich’s well-documented confession which reflects my own maternal passion when she says “my children cause me the most exquisite suffering of which I have any experience. It is the suffering of ambivalence: the murderous raw-edged nerves and blissful gratification and tenderness”(1976, p. 21). Rich’s articulation of her own maternal ambivalence which mirror my own, are explicated by Parker (1997, p. 17) when she states “maternal ambivalence constitutes not an anodyne condition of mixed feelings, but a complex and contradictory state of mind, shared variously by all mothers, in which loving and hating feelings for children exist side by side”.

Kristeva’s (2005, p. 20) distinction between emotion and passion is articulated when she says that “motherhood is a passion in the sense that the emotions (of attachment and aggression towards the fetus, baby and child) turn into love ... with its hate correlative reduced.” In this research project I utilise a combination of Parker’s theory of maternal ambivalence alongside Kristeva’s thoughts on maternal passion, which stem from Klein’s reparation and responsibility, as a mechanism in creative practice. I call upon my awareness of maternal ambivalence and my own maternal passion, which is both tender and fierce, to redirect negative impulses into creative outcomes via the photographic process in the hope of developing a rich and unique relationship with my children Georgia and Henry.

I also seek to impart heterogenous opportunities for maternal subjectivities by declaring my personal maternal ambivalence. As Parker (1995, p. 20) reminds us, “a taboo on maternal ambivalence inflects both cultural representations of the mother and the social arrangements of motherhood.” This research seeks to illuminate the potential of maternal ambivalence to enhance maternal facility and refuses the denial of maternal ambivalence in contemporary culture in the hope of increasing social opportunities for mothers independent of their maternity. I concede that seeking to initiate a discussion of maternal passion may seem counter to a search for freedom from the manacles of maternity.

However, I believe it is necessary to create the opportunity for complex maternities to be played out in the cultural realm to, in turn, be set free from the homogenous proposition Western society offers mothers. Nash (2005, p. 4) reinforces the emancipatory potential of female subjectivity via the expression of maternal ambivalence when she comments “it seems that a dismantling of the taboo surrounding maternal ambivalence such as Rozsika Parker prescribes, could lead to a fuller, more creative, autonomous experience of female subjectivity in general, whether a woman decides to become a mother or not.” Furthermore, Nash (2005, p. 4) maintains that Parker’s study of maternal ambivalence, which allows for an acknowledgment of “women’s autonomous subjectivities, and sexual differences (from differently positioned women, from men, from children) is a necessary condition of creative, more equitable relationships between all of us.” I struggle to reconceptualise maternity via my photographic process, discarding a homogenising, phallogentric prescription of mothering.

Contemporary Western culture persists with stereotypical ideals of motherhood that are attached to goodness, natural ability, undying love and self-sacrifice. Yet, as Anne Karpf (2008, p. 1) reminds us, “accompanying idealisation, as any psychoanalyst will tell you, is denigration.” Mothers continually face the social judgement of good vs bad mothering, which is often self-imposed. This insistence on the oppositional rendering of motherhood, Parker (1995) believes, is based on an infantile terror of loss, which is shielded against by idealising or vilifying the mother. Parker insists that as a means of control “our culture defends itself against the recognition of ambivalence originating in the mother by denigrating or idealising her” (Parker, 1995, p. 20). Mothers who attempt to challenge these restrictive, oppositional ideas of maternity in creative practice are viewed with suspicion and fear and I discuss this further in the next chapter.

Like Kristeva and Parker, I also recognise the intricacy of my own maternal subjectivity as motivation for this particular research project, which interrogates the complexity of the maternal relationship via photographs of my own children. Throughout, I attempt to express the conglomerate doubts, desires and passions of my own maternity. Parker maintains that “a mother needs to know herself, to own up to the diverse, contradictory, often overwhelming feelings evoked by motherhood” (2006, p2). Furthermore, I hold close the assertion made by Jan Campbell (2005, p. 35) that “creative mothering involves ambivalence” and I also recognise my children’s own creative and reciprocal ambivalence towards me, their mother. Together, as mother and child, we use an artistic, photographic process to deepen our own unique mutual, and also necessarily separate and interconnected, psychodynamics. In a discussion on the ability of creative work to manifest maternal ambivalence in maternal artist Louise Bourgeois’s work, Mignon Nixon (2005, p. 276) states:

Bourgeois suggests the mother who carries, bears, and tends her child ‘expecting

to lodge it in the realm of love' suffers phantasies of failure, abandonment, and destruction that may in turn rebound upon the child. In defense of them both, she nurtures her own ambivalence, and that of her child.

This project combines theory with practice and is underpinned by a desire to explore a vision of maternity that accommodates maternal ambivalence. The images in this research as part of an open investigative process through the practice of photography, reference my own maternal depressive position and melancholic mourning for the loss of my children, as they continue on their journey of separation from me. This work is wrapped in maternal passion, providing emancipatory representations of subjectivity, through a powerful and complex mother-child bond.

Chapter 2 removed due to copyright limitations.

Chapter Three

“It Won’t Come Smooth”

Childhood photography and the construction of the child

“The destinies of art and of childhood innocence cross paths through photography” (Faulkner, 2011, p. 49).

Since the Middle Ages “our world [has been] obsessed by the physical, moral and sexual problems of childhood” (Philippe Aries 1962, p. 422). The significance of this statement by childhood historian Aries still remains profound almost one decade into the twenty-first century. In Australia, the preoccupation with the sexualization of children in the media, popular culture, photography and art is still high on the public agenda. Disappointingly, however, the debate that perpetually surrounds the representation of childhood, particularly in photographic images, often lacks critical reflection. Popular arguments in the media repeatedly fail to acknowledge and contextualise the complex and conglomerate factors which contribute to the discussion and construction of childhood in Western society. Indeed, public insecurity over the portrayal of childhood in photographs is often ignited by those who attempt to promote a debate around childhood that is as empty and over simplified as their own nostalgic vision of childhood. Miranda Devine, opinion columnist for *The Sydney Morning Herald*, is one advocate of the belief that childhood is under threat by those who recognise the intricacies of the debate. Devine, (2008, p. 1) in an article that hotly articulates concerns over the “sexing up of our children” implores:

The effort over many decades by various groups artists, perverts, academics, libertarians, the media and advertising industries, respectable corporations and the porn industry- to smash taboos of previous generations and define down community standards, has successfully eroded the special protection once afforded childhood.

Devine’s lament about the erosion of a unified sentimental vision of an ideal childhood of yester year is a common distortion which would be better recognised in the debate as the promotion of an imagined ideal – a virtual childhood. It is an argument that attempts to seduce with a clear picture of utopian childhood but can only deliver its verisimilitude. Furthermore, the emphasis on the sanctity of childhood and ‘the special protection once afforded childhood’ in bygone eras should be examined with greater rigour before being held up as a model. James Kincaid in *Child loving* (1992, p. 64) warns of the potential dangers and possible ramifications for children who may be ascribed inferior and ‘other’ status to adults through blind reverence to voices from the past, without critical analysis, when he states:

This difference in the past might suggest something about the quality of difference we assign in the present, a difference which can resemble very closely the otherness with which we formulate women and minorities. Like these, children are denied direct access to legal and social institutions; not permitted to decide their own fates; expected to defer to the preferences and judgements of the upper class (adults); and denied specific privileges of the upper class... We live under the assumption that children are especially privileged and that our entire culture is "child centred" but the "romantic mythology" encrusting childhood is very much like that used for racial and gender power moves: children, 'coloureds', and women are all depicted as naturally carefree, fortunate to be unsuited to the burdens of autonomy and decision-making, and better off protected by those in control.

To discover more sophisticated, multifarious viewpoints from which to adequately explicate the debate over the portrayal of childhood in contemporary visual culture than the one espoused by Devine, it is imperative to critically consider the construction of childhood in relation to photography. Significantly, any examination of the literature that explores the construction of childhood since the inception of photography reveals that children have figured as primary and complex subjects of portrait photography as "the child and the camera belong together" (Jerry Korn, 1971, p. 12). Moreover, photography's contribution to the construction of childhood cannot be overlooked. Mavor (cited in Brown, 2002, p. 27) argues "the camera had to be invented in order to document what would soon be lost, childhood itself; and childhood had to be invented in order for the camera to document childhood (a fantasy of innocence) as real." Childhood and photography have developed in tandem and photography offered a unique method for adults to represent childhood.

The unmitigated fascination with children in amateur and professional photography is, Rachel Rosenfield Lafo (2008, p. 10) claims, because children "are seen as a blank slate, vulnerable and malleable, on whom adult hopes, wishes, and expectations can be projected." The popular portrayal of children in photography since 1840 has also, according to George Dimock (2004, p. 1), "played a crucial role in reflecting, producing and disseminating a Romantic ideal of children as innocent, vulnerable, emotionally priceless beings in need of special nurturance from all adult forms of work and social interchange." Mavor (2002, p. 27) concurs "childhood as we now understand it, as innocent and pure, walled off from adult life (like a child's bedroom in a bourgeois home, even the home itself), was perfected side by side with the development of photography". Whether as an artistic device, a document, an advertising tool or a medium for the promotion of social change, photography has significantly contributed to the Western world's perception of childhood. "The child and the photograph were commodified, fetishized, developed alongside each other: they were laminated and framed as one" (Mavor, 2002, p. 3). Photography in the twenty-first century paradoxically continues to extensively contribute to, as well as critique, the notions of an adult/child divide and western culture's continued obsession with the morality and sexual dilemmas that perpetually orbit childhood.

Children and photography: A chimera

Defining childhood is an uneasy task since what it means to be a child is determined by multiple and conflicting dynamics within specific cultures. Jenks (2005, p. 122) explicates that childhood is experienced differently by particular children interculturally and also intraculturally when he says that “the experience of childhood is fragmented and stratified, by class, age, gender and ethnicity, by urban or rural locations and by particularized identities cast for children through disability or ill health.” Yet, despite the realisation by sociologists that children’s social and personal experiences will influence their own unique lived childhood, children remain entangled within “the forced commonality of an ideological discourse of childhood” (Jenks, 2005, p. 122). In other words, childhood is often mistakenly dominantly inscribed as a homogenous episode for all children. Nevertheless, the disparity between the actual lived experiences of a particular child and the institution of childhood has informed emergent theories of childhood by social scientists that examine the historical and social contexts that encircle childhood.

Western notions that childhood is culturally and historically specific are well documented. However, new sociological studies of childhood have theorised four underlying themes, which have contributed to the idea of childhood since the eighteenth century. Jenks (2005, p. 123) isolates these themes as:

- (i) that the child is set apart temporarily as different, through the calculation of age;
- (ii) that the child is deemed to have a special nature determined by Nature;
- (iii) that the child is innocent; and (iv) that the child therefore is vulnerably dependent.

Jenks (2005) concludes that these themes which categorise Western childhood pivot on questions of the child’s morality and also on its capability. Children, then, within western culture are seen to be reliant on adults both for spiritual and physical well-being and for this reason childhood remains a highly contested area. It is imperative specifically in this era where childhood is “with an intensity perhaps unprecedented... popularized, politicized, scrutinized and analysed” (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998, p. 3) that there is an interrogation of what Jenks describes as the “possessive adhesion of adults to the concept of childhood.” This self-reflexive, creative research project will interrogate my own maternal “possessive adhesion” to my children and our mutual shared experience of particular branches of their complex childhoods, which are perpetually in flux.

In *Theorizing childhood*, James, Jenks and Prout (1998) outline that while developing sociological approaches to the study of childhood may sometimes diverge they also share commonalities and a motivation to apply social theory to the realm of childhood. James, Jenks and Prout state that

childhood is “very much an issue of our time”(1998, p. 4) and set out to expand a “new paradigm’ which recognises children as agents with “a call for children to be understood as social actors shaping as well as shaped by their circumstance” (1998, p. 6). Within this research I engage James, Jenks and Prouts call to acknowledge children as agents with a collaborative creative approach in which I embrace the opportunity to depict Georgia and Henry as actors within the images I make and I encourage them both to co-direct their own performances for my camera. I concur with James, Jenks and Prout (1998) that in the early decades of the twenty-first century new arenas, which further a shift in the presupposed understandings of childhood as a unitary vision, require attention. With this research project it is my intention to invite engagement with, and also to encourage alternatives to, open-ended interpretations of the photographs to provide possibilities for a more complex vision of childhood than is commonly seen in conventional contemporary visual culture.

Examinations of the constructed ideal of childhood in the majority of disciplines overwhelmingly explicate the fabrication of an idyllic Romantic childhood which emerged in the late eighteenth century. Dimock, says Kincaid (1998, p. 53), reminds us that “the Romantic child, formulated at the end of the eighteenth Century, was injected with a host of qualities naturalness, innocence, downright divinity.” It is appropriate to begin with Kincaid’s formulations of childhood as linked to innocence in an examination of the construction of childhood in visual culture and art history. In line with Kincaid, Higonnet (2002, p. 204) asserts, “Romantic childhood as a subject, deflects knowing because it was constructed to be the denial of knowledge. Romantic childhood was a state of not knowing.” This naivety, ascribed to childhood, positioned the child as vulnerable and weak in contrast to the adult as powerful and authoritative adult. Kincaid (1992, p. 72) states, “prior to the eighteenth century, says Aries, nobody worried about soiling childish innocence because ‘nobody thought that this innocence really existed’. Now, however, the notion that the child was innocent, valuable, and weak became common.” Kincaid reinforces that childhood innocence was manufactured and this quality seen as obligatory for childhood.

The idea of childhood as a constructed Romantic ideal where the child is figured as the embodiment of innocence, as well as separate and different from adulthood, is one of the major ideas that surrounds the construction of childhood through art history in both the nineteenth century and early twentieth centuries. Waggoner (cited in Brown, 2002, p. 149) argues that photographer Charles Dodgson’s (better known as Lewis Carroll) photographs “articulate an historical concept of the self predicated upon an explicit differentiation of children from adults. This differentiation could, of course, include sexuality, but that was not its only focus.” Historian Philippe Aries in *Centuries of childhood* (Aries is considered to be the first to examine the archaeology of childhood images) examines the construction of childhood since the Middle Ages, and while Aries does not specifically

explicate the role of photography in his ideas pertaining to the invention of childhood, he nevertheless, maintains that childhood became distinct and separated from adulthood in the late nineteenth century. This placement was approximate to Dodgson's practice, which terminated suddenly and without explanation in 1880. Aries (1962, p. 38) asserts, "today, as also towards the end of the nineteenth century, we tend to separate the world of children from that of adults." This separation of the child from adult society established a difference between adult and child that was unrecognised in medieval times where "as soon as he had been weaned, or soon after, the child became the natural companion of the adult" (1962, p. 412). Changing ideas about the role of the family and a new found recognition of the importance of education in the seventeenth century isolated the child from the realm of the adult. According to Aries (1962, p. 413), 'family and school together removed the child from adult society. The school shut up childhood, which had hitherto been free within an increasingly severe disciplinary system, that culminated in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.' The eighteenth century, says Aries (1962, p. 413), introduced a newfound "obsessive love" of the child, a subject who had previously been accorded indifference.

The child's isolation from society in the eighteenth century was cemented in the new, middle class and increasingly moral and private modern family. Aries (1962, p. 412) notes the influence of the church and its teachings over parents in the newly formed nuclear family. Promotion of parental duty, religious instruction and emphasis on education all served blueprints for childhood and the rise of the middle class family. Aries (1962, p. 413) maintains:

This new concern about education would gradually install itself in the heart of society and transform it from top to bottom. The family ceased to be simply an institution for the transmission of a name and an estate it assumed a moral and a spiritual function, it moulded bodies and souls.

Withdrawal of the child into the private and walled-off sanctity of the middle-class family was brought about by a need for the middle-class family to "organize itself separately, in a homogeneous environment, among its families, in homes designed for privacy, in new districts kept free from lower class contamination" (Aries, 1962, p. 413). The new middle-class family environment was seen as a safe, protective and ideal precinct where children would flourish under the firm grip of their parents in the family. Indeed, Jenks (2005, p. 58) in *Childhood* concurs that since the Enlightenment (a Western philosophical position that emerged in the eighteenth century) "the child has moved through time and obscurity to the centre stage. The child is forever assured the spotlight of public policy and attention and also a primary place in the family ... the family has come to be defined in terms of the child's presence." This homogenous model of family life, which according to Aries (1962, p. 413) was categorised by "privacy" and "comfort", replaced an older model, which was less highly pitched in terms of moral attitude and more diverse in the cultural

crossover between classes in daily life. According to Aries (1962, p. 413) as he concludes his social history of family life, “the concept of the family, the concept of class... appear as the same intolerance towards variety, the same insistence on uniformity.”

This new ideal, motivated by the Enlightenment of the modern middle-class family, enabled photographers, in particular domestic portrait photographers, to contribute to the burgeoning construction of a Victorian child. Photography, it seemed, provided an ideal vehicle for the normalisation of this newly formed concept of an ostensibly natural and stable family model. According to John Pultz (1995, p. 9) in *Photography and the body*, “photography is a metonym for the Enlightenment ... The Enlightenment valued empiricism, the belief that experience, especially those of the senses, is the only source of knowledge. Photography seemed like the perfect Enlightenment tool.” The camera, despite its reliance on human operation, was seen to function as an independent eye, devoid of emotion or intellect—an authentic observer of a fundamental reality and therefore a vehicle for the promotion of an Enlightenment borne univocal family ideal. Pultz (1995, p. 9) says, “the existence of photography ... buttressed the Enlightenment account of the coherent individual, or subject.” Furthermore Gray, (2008, p. 86) concurs that epistemologies developed in the so-called Enlightenment epoch “were based in assumptions that the determinations and directions of the social world were constant and independent forces. It was supposed that the application of logical reasoning and justice would lead, eventually and inevitably, to a utopian society.” Nonetheless, neither photography nor childhood could, however, corroborate the Enlightenment notion of reality as a distinct entity impervious to human influence for as Patricia Pace (2002, p. 327) maintains:

childhood is also a cultural construct embedded in a body of discourse. Like photography itself, which claims as its ontology the ability to mirror the natural world and to fix that image permanently, childhood is understood to be a phenomenon of nature. Like photography itself, “... where ‘fleeting’ time is ‘arrested’ in the ‘space of a single minute’” (qtd. in Batchen 1991, p. 5) childhood is marked by our desire for permanence and fixity, always already threatened by the age (and the forces of a corrupt society).

Since the twentieth century, discussion of photography’s paradoxical constitution, its seeming ability to transmit unmediated representations of the truth whilst being entirely dependent on human perception has been wide and varied: in particular and of note are John Berger (1972), Frank Webster (1980), John Tagg (1988), Allan Sekula (1992) and Geoffrey Batchen (1997), all of whom have argued that photography can never be posited as a conduit of the truth. Webster (1980) maintains that photography’s potency springs from its “iconic and symbolic duality” and he stresses that “the photographic paradox lies in the need for translation alongside translation’s redundancy” (1980, p. 57). Webster recognised that photographs can’t be cognized without translation. Rather, they are invested with cultural codes and subsequently perform beyond the capacity of pale

transmitters. Photographs are culturally designated and convey particular points of view, which require interpretation to be properly understood. Batchen (1997, p. 4) reinforces Webster when he states, "the crucial point is that photographs can never exist outside discourses or functions of one kind or another. There is never a neutral ground where the photograph is able to speak 'of and for itself,' where it can emit some essential, underlying 'true' meaning." Photography then, could only contribute to the chimera of the Enlightenment's homogenous, ideal family with the child placed gently at its centre; it could never substantiate the model family as a natural and detached entity devoid of social and political engineering.

Calvin Bedient (1999, p1) also draws a parallel between photography and the rise of middle-class values and supports Aries' claims on the rise of the middle class family in the nineteenth century when he stating:

By the time modern pictures of childhood began to appear in significant numbers, several concepts crucial to a new attitude were firmly in place: a private, nurturing middle-class nuclear family as the building block of society; a capitalist opposition between masculine public and feminine domestic spheres; and a political belief in the innate worth of the individual. Together, these concepts fostered a sheltered, mothering domain within which childhood could exist apart.

Aries' ideas of the child as a "conceptual and thus biological and social category" (Kincaid, 1998, p. 61), however, remain contested. Historian and psychoanalyst Lloyd deMause (1974, p. 5), argues that Aries' theories, including the idea of childhood as separate, are untenable. He expresses his surprise at the popularity of Aries' hypotheses on childhood when he states, "the notion of the 'invention of childhood' is so fuzzy that it is surprising that so many historians have picked it up". By contrast, James Kincaid believes that Aries' ideas of the child as separate from the adult and childhood as an invention is helpful when applied to any analysis of childhood: "if we think of it as illuminating modern ways of seeing rather than offering a confident description of the past, the idea of the invented child can be useful...we can watch as the modern child takes shape divorcing itself from the adult gradually until it is very nearly an alien, unknowable and not quite real" (1998, p. 52). The idea of childhood as social construction underpins this explication of childhood photography and follows the recognition in contemporary analyses of childhood that 'the child' is socially constructed. Jenks (2005, p. 6) succinctly posits that:

Childhood is to be understood as a social construct; it makes reference to a social status delineated by boundaries that vary through time and from society to society but which are incorporated within the social structure and thus manifested through and formative of certain typical forms of conduct. Childhood then always related to a particular cultural setting.

Marilyn Brown also asserts that childhood reflects adult sentiments, and that it is principally a cultural construct. She also supports the scope and potential for a greater understanding of childhood via an examination of childhood as invention. In *Picturing children* (2002, p. 1) Brown asserts that the idea of childhood as invention has been recognised across disciplines when she claims, “in recent years, childhood’s invented status as a mediation between public norms and private life has been discussed from the point of view of a variety of disciplines, including developmental psychology, anthropology, sociology, literary criticism, cultural studies, and art history.”

While it remains difficult to discover and discern a specific, universal idea of what constitutes childhood and debate persists across disciplines, the idea of ‘the child’ as socially constructed is now accepted in most discussions of the history and sociology of childhood (Aries, 1962; Kincaid, 1992; Zornado, 2001; Brown, 2002; Jenks, 2005,). However, developmental psychology, which was pioneered as a body of scientific knowledge by Jean Piaget, fails to recognise the child as social invention. Rather, developmental psychology employs a selective focus on that which Archard (1993, p. 65) describes as “cognitive competencies” to separate the child from the adult. Mayrhofer, Balnaves and Quin (2003, p. 5) concur that Piagetian ideas of development “gave rise to a body of scientific knowledge whose disciples seem not to address the notion of the social construction of the child, but rather take as given that children are totally different from adults.” Moreover Piaget’s “work meticulously constitutes a particular system of scientific rationality and presents it as being both natural and universal” (Jenks 2005, p. 21). For the purposes of my research I question the developmental theory of childhood laid out by Piaget and instead concentrate on discourses that refuse “the widespread tendency to routinize and ‘naturalize’ childhood, both in common sense and in theory... to conceal its analytic importance behind a cloak of the mundane; its significance and ‘strangeness’ as a social phenomenon is obscured” (Jenks, 2005 p. 7). The ‘strangeness’ of childhood as a social agreement is played out through the creative content of this research and further discussed later in relation to photographs of children by myself and other photographers.

It is timely to interrogate the underlying themes of childhood in art photography in light of the establishment of recent restrictions on the depiction of children in art and, in particular photography, by the Australia Council for the Arts that are laid out in the ‘Protocols for working with children in arts 2008’ document. I believe it is crucial to raise questions and agitate the dominant paradigm of childhood when opportunities for the depiction of diverse and unfamiliar childhoods is subject to social control and subsequent limitation. I attempt to transgress the widespread portrayal of a homogenous childhood by representing childhood transgressions in my photographs. Jenks (2005, p. 150) argues that childhood transgressions are invaluable levers, which can facilitate a critical

review of out-moded perceptions of childhood. Childhood transgressions can also challenge normative ways of thinking and point to a reimagining of childhood as well as the 'missing, unexpressed and disempowered' aspects of our adult selves. In accordance with Jenks (2005, p. 150), I embrace the idea that "children explore the very limits of consciousness and highlight, once again, the indefatigable, inherent and infinitely variable capacity to transgress.

Powerfully: Others together

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Enlightenment philosopher and author, is often noted by historians as being instrumental in promoting a glorious and sentimental vision of childhood, which he set out in his 1762 exposition on education *Emile*. Higonnet explains that "childhood had been equated by Enlightenment thinkers above all Jean Jacques Rousseau, with nature, and hence with an innocent purity of vision and creativity" (2002, p. 202). Brown asserts Rousseau's *Emile* specifically heralded the "Romantic cult of childhood" (2002, p. 3), a sentimental vision of childhood as an idealised state. However, Rousseau's belief that children are also born weak and are therefore open to physical and emotional damage and are in need of careful moulding is laid out forcefully when Rousseau (cited in Kincaid, 1992, p. 64) states "What the child should know, is that it is weak and that you adult are strong; and from this difference it follows that it is under your authority. That is what the child should know, that is what it ought to learn, that is what it must feel." This relegation of the child as weak laid out by Rousseau is problematic because it institutes a binary that positions the child as subservient and other to the adult.

The disempowerment that occurred with the institution of the Romantic child as different or 'the Other' remains a threat in the twenty-first century and Jenks argues that despite developing ideas pertaining to childhood a paradox which reveal the child as other continues to be sustained: "the child is familiar to us and yet strange; he or she inhabits our world and yet seems to answer to another; he or she is essentially of ourselves and yet ... a different order of being" (Jenks, 2005, p. 2). The child throughout discourse is positioned as other to the adult and as Jenks (2005, p. 3) points out, "the relationship child-adult appears locked within the binary reasoning which, for so long, both contained and constrained critical thought in relation to gender and ethnicity." At a lecture titled 'Picturing Innocence: Children and representation' given at the University of Western Australia in March 2009, author Catharine Lumby described the child as "the new woman" in terms of being categorised as 'the Other' (opposite) in contemporary Australian society. The "Other" is utilised in psychoanalytic theory and drawn from Jacques Lacan's rethinking of Freud's Oedipal complex. Lacan examined the formulation of the self in relation to the acquisition of language and subsequent acceptance of, and entry into, the "Symbolic Order" or Law of the Father. The "Symbolic Order" is that which, according to Sandy Flitterman Lewis (cited in Allen, 1992, p. 209)

“roughly equivalent to the Oedipal process and encompasses all discourses and cultural exchange ... symbolized by the father and signifying the Law (of culture), disrupts the harmony of the dual relation between (m)other and child in the imaginary.”

After the child enters the “Symbolic”, a phallogocentric structure which governs the rules of communication, s/he will lose the mother and be drawn into a relation with language and culture. Once established in the “Symbolic” the child will experience what Lacan (1975, p. 73) named “sexuation” which is determined by sexual difference. The phallus as the primary signifier in the “Symbolic” privileges the masculine and positions the female as deficient; hence, as Jacqueline Rose (2005, p. 74) explains “as negative to the man, woman becomes a total object of fantasy (or an object of total fantasy), elevated into the place of the Other and made to stand for its truth.” In other words, woman is constructed as an opposite– an “Other”– by men in order for men to realise themselves as masculine. In the photographs for this research as a woman I embrace my own position of “Other” to align myself to my children who as such are also positioned as “Other”, in order to subvert the “Law of the Father”. Rose (2005, p.) states, “the Other therefore stands against the phallus its pretence to meaning and false consistency. It is from the Other that the phallus seeks authority and is refused.”

Social historian Joseph Zornado (2001, p. 103) further explicates this hierarchy of dominance between adult and child and establishment of the child as ‘the Other’ in *Inventing the child* where he maintains:

Victorian institutions merely refracted and intensified what most Victorians had been taught since birth and therefore accepted unquestioningly. From the cradle, the child learned that the world was divided between those who physically dominate and those who were dominated. Moreover, power-as in adult power- was always allied with moral authority. The child’s power was allied with savagery, wilfulness, indolence, wickedness, and immorality. Resistance to moral authority was a sign of one’s otherness, and therefore justified even sterner “civilizing” measures.

The moral authority exercised by adults over children described by Zornado is also discussed in *Social relations and human attributes* by Paul Hirst and Penny Woolley, who parallel the disciplinary function of adults over children within the domestic realm of the family home alongside confining institutions such as prison and the asylum, which seek to reform the wayward. Hirst and Woolley (1982, p. 188) draw from Michel Foucault’s writings in *Discipline and punish* and *Madness and civilization*, which examine the “common regime of ‘disciplinarity’ across and within institutions.” Hirst and Woolley (1982, p. 189) explain that this particular form of ‘government’ within closed institutions which became apparent at the close of the eighteenth century, relies on “a common regime of discipline characterized by surveillance” and furthermore that:

Disciplinarity radiates outward from the closed space of the institution to affect conduct beyond its walls, to relate to the family, its domestic economy and internal management. Aspects of the disciplinary regime are to be found in the models of the education of children, the supervision of the poor in their homes and so on.

The family is a political entity, an institution where 'the child' (if managed efficiently by adults at the pinnacle of the hierarchical family structure) is moulded into a well-balanced and socially disinfected individual. Jacques Donzelot (1979, p. 48) describes the family as the "smallest political organization possible." Within this private institution, Western society expects discipline to be administered by adults to children to limit the child's free will and control his/her behaviour: "the modern family has become the locus for the confluence of politics and individual psychology, but beyond this it has emerged as both the primary unit for and also the site of governmentality, that is, it both absorbs and distributes social control" (Jenks 2005, p. 104). Parents/caretakers in the domestic domain of the Western family are established as reformers, or corrective agents, who must 'handle' their children to facilitate the transformation of child to adolescent into decent citizens of capitalist society.

Capitalism is reliant on the modern family for its future as "the modern family has become the basic unit of social cohesion in advancing capitalism... it has become the very epitome of the rational enterprise" (Jenks 2005, p. 105). This is not to say that capitalist society best serves children and, as Mayrhofer, Balnaves and Quin (2003, p. 10) remind us, "in modern Australian capitalist society, economic power is still an important determinant of social value... In the case of children ... economic power is actively denied them." The ramifications for adults and in particular women, who are still overwhelmingly responsible as primary care givers in the modern family are teased out in detail later. And the consequences for childhood of the changing face of the family in post-modern times are also examined further on. There is no denying, however, that children are substantially less empowered compared to adults within the modern family unit favoured by Western capitalist society. However, while there exists an asymmetry of power within the modern family unit, the circulation of power between adult and child is fluid and not exclusively repressive for the child.

Power relationships which encircle particular social systems, such as the school, the hospital, the asylum and the family are explained by Foucault (cited in Barker, 1998, p.27) when he states "power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategic situation in a particular society." For Foucault power is a resource that remains unfixed and irreducible to a uniform source, nor is it necessarily a prohibitive force. Foucault indicates the potential of power when he says:

If power were never anything but repressive, if it never did anything but to say no, do you really think that one would be brought to obey it? What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than a negative instance whose function is repression (cited in Calhoun, 2007, p.203).

I accept that there exists an asymmetry of power relations between myself as a parent and an adult and my children, yet I also acknowledge that there exists the opportunity for liberation within this limitation for Gray (2008, p. 91) concurs with Foucault when she says, "freedom refers to an ability to transgress a particular set of power relations, inscribed in each and everyone of us." I embrace the fluid possibilities of power in this research practice, but I am also cautious for, as Cox (1996, p, 206) warns, there is a "danger of beginning to see all relationships with children as relationships of power." Consequently I incorporate Kristeva's "Herethics", founded on a shared remembrance of the bond that exists between mother and child during pregnancy facilitating a mutual *jouissance* which disturbs asymmetrical power relationships.

Strange fascinations

Since the Victorian era, the majority of photographic representations of children have actively sought to promote innocent childhood as an ideal, one that is fixed, tied to nature, independent of culture and construction. Images of children in carefree situations (the child usually unaware of the camera's presence) are used to promote an illusion of naivety. Photographs of doe-eyed children, smiling at the camera or engaged in some child-like activity, continue to pervade domestic, and public, photographic representations of childhood in western culture. And photographers, whether amateur or professional, continue to employ photographic conventions, such as timing, camera angle, lens choice and framing amongst others, to offer a seemingly unmediated vision of childhood. Korn (1973, p. 12) recognises the novelty and appeal of childhood innocence, which suggests the otherness of the child to the adult and the seemingly 'natural' state of childhood, stating:

the tubby toddler and the little terror, the demure young lady and the hesitant explorer, the daydreamer and the warrior. Nowhere is there a subject so versatile, so artless, so beguiling, so ever- changing and so dependable as the child. Children are, as these pictures eloquently demonstrate, the photographer's inexhaustible subject.

Two amateur photographers of the Victorian era, Charles Dodgson (Dodgson is best known by his pseudonym Lewis Carroll) and Julia Margaret Cameron, did however, offer an alternative and extraordinary vision of childhood that was uncommon for their time. Dodgson and Cameron were

active in the mid eighteenth hundreds and both demonstrated an awareness of sexual performance in the child. Each produced images that revealed the potential of childhood to be uneasy and unfamiliar. Korn (1973, p. 51) believes “Lewis Carroll avoided stereotyped poses and expressions. He was one of the first artists to see the little devil that lay just below the surface of the little angel.” Like Dodgson’s, Cameron’s images are ambiguous representations of the performance of childhood. As Mavor illuminates “The images, which are often literally blurred, move metaphorically between categories, smearing the lines between sexual and non-sexual, male and female, earthly and heavenly. They move like an apparition leaving the viewer perplexed about what has been seen”(1995, p. 47). Both Cameron and Carroll are considered the two most significant and widely discussed photographers of Victorian childhood. The influence of Dodgson’s photographic contribution was pivotal as Waggoner (cited in Brown, 2002, p. 149) maintains: “Dodgson’s photographs established new visual parameters for the representation of children.”The strength of the works of these two Victorian art photographers lies in their representation of the strangeness and uncertainties of childhood rather than the fixed ideals of innocence and purity that Kincaid renders as imperilled.

Cameron has been widely celebrated, particularly in feminist analysis, for her desire to overthrow social convention in her depictions of childhood. Amanda Hopkinson (1986, p.108) maintains of Cameron, “she was rare in her determination ... She defiantly photographed outside set conventions.” Carroll, in contrast, embraced a more mathematical, structured approach in his photographic practice with the incorporation of photographic conventions, such as correct exposure, sharp focus and procedures that ensured exquisite prints: this combination seemingly allowed his representations to appear superior in material quality, and to reflect his technical prowess and his talent. Cameron eschewed the rigorous technical conventions, such as sharp focus and surface clarity, that were considered crucial for the production of fine photography by the largely male-dominated new photographers of the time. Cameron’s images draw attention to their construction; they reference her recognition of photography as a mode of communication rather than an objective source of the truth. Higdonnet (1998, p. 112) argues, “Carroll among others, criticized Cameron precisely because she refused to treat the camera as a mechanical instrument.” The patriarchal scorn Cameron received due to her refusal to conform to an accepted code of practice in her photographs is evidenced in a reprinted review of Cameron’s works from *The Photographic Journal* that states, “in these pictures, all that is good in photography has been rejected and the shortcomings of the art are prominently exhibited. We are sorry to speak thus severely on the works of a lady, but we feel compelled to do so in the interest of the art” (cited in Heilbrunn timeline of art history, 2009, p. 1). This criticism alongside Dodgson’s disapproval of Cameron’s approach, reveals that, despite being highly regarded by some, Cameron endured the ridicule of her predominantly male contemporaries in the Victorian period.

While Cameron was ridiculed for her lack of technical prowess, Dodgson drew controversy for his seemingly perverse interest in young girls, which was evident in his photography, his writings, such as, *Alice in Wonderland*, and his personal life. Helmut Gernsheim (1969, p. 16) states of Dodgson that “the shy, pedantic mathematical lecturer completely unbent in the company of little girls whom he never tired of entertaining.” Concerns that Dodgson was a potential paedophile are well documented. Numerous biographies of Dodgson, including those by Gernsheim (1969), Morton Cohen (1995), Donald Thomas (1996) and Michael Bakewell (1996) all suggest Dodgson had obsessive ongoing relationships with young girls. Gernsheim (1969, p. v) speculates that Dodgson’s ‘love’ for his most well-known child muse, Alice Liddell (who influenced his popular, 1865-published *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*), was confirmed with a marriage proposal to the eleven year old that was rebuffed by the family. Dodgson’s attraction to young girls is conveyed thus by Gernsheim (1969, p. 18), who includes a quote from Dodgson himself when he states:

Beautiful little girls had a strange fascination for Lewis Carroll. This curious relationship, which may best be described as innocent love, ceased in the majority of cases when the girls first put up their hair. ‘About nine out of ten, I think, of my child relationships get shipwrecked at the critical point “where the stream and the river meet”, and the child friends, once so affectionate, become uninteresting acquaintances whom I have no wish to set eyes on again.

While Gernsheim does not specify an age when “girls first put up their hair”, in Victorian times the process was gradual and occurred in stages which signalled a rite of passage for maturing young women. Plaits and ribbons were initially used to harness the budding girl’s locks until they were eventually entirely pinned up when the girl reached sixteen (Victoria Sherrow, 2006, p. 94). Dodgson’s enthrallment with little girls hair is evident in his image *Irene Macdonald, It Won’t Come Smooth*. The portrait of Irene MacDonald reveals the barefoot child standing in what appears to be her bedroom dressed in a starched Victorian night gown, clutching a large hairbrush and a hand-mirror in alternate hands, while standing next to a chair almost her own size. Her wild, untamed hair contrasts the stiff fabric of her nightshirt. Nina Auerbach (1987, p. 122) reveals Dodgson’s fascination with the little girl’s hair when she quotes Carroll from his own diary entry that reads, “I can imagine no more delightful occupation than brushing Ellen Terry’s hair.” Unfortunately, the majority of the diaries that were kept by Carroll have mysteriously disappeared and consensus on their disappearance has not been reached by biographers, historians or Dodgson’s family. Knowledge of Dodgson’s apparent fixation with girlhood tresses from a rarely cited diary entry introduces and sustains an erotic charge to the image.

In viewing *It Won’t Come Smooth* Mavor (1996, p. 110) has said, “it is not difficult to imagine Carroll fiddling with Irene’s hair.” While to imagine Dodgson stroking Irene’s hair is an uncomfortable

proposition, the very possibility of understanding Dodgson when we gaze upon Irene demonstrates why this is a critical image. It is Irene's gaze at Dodgson the photographer in this particular photograph that alerts the viewer to Dodgson's very own act of looking at the little girl. Irene's stare, and her grimace here create an unfamiliar yet acute awareness in the viewer that this is a photographic act, a performance of the child directed by Dodgson. *It Won't Come Smooth* is a layered, complex image that has the potential to disturb and unsettle the viewer with its incorporation of contradictions that manifest in the image via the clothing, the setting and the expression and gesture of the little girl and indeed, even the image's title. The title of the image itself is also imbued with a depth of meaning when one contemplates Dodgson's relationship with children, and the intricate connections between childhood and photography. Irene's small stature is emphasised and contrasted with the hairbrush that appears better suited to grooming a horse than the head of a little girl. Irene is also further diminished in height by the sizeable chair, which eerily seems to suggest an adult presence. The severe, tightly buttoned, freshly starched, restraining nightshirt contrasts with Irene's uncontrollable mane, which, it appears she has no wish to tame, with the oversized brush in the hand mirror, both of which could belong to her mother. Dodgson's "authorship" in *It Won't Come Smooth* is made evident by the way he has drawn attention to the construction of the image. Waggoner (cited in Brown, 2002, p.158) emphasises the self-reflexivity of Dodgson's photography when she explains:

He separates childhood from adulthood by making difference visible on the child's body. His visualization nevertheless depends upon the consciousness of the act, or play, of posing and the active engagement with the little girl with Dodgson the photographer. Dodgson taught the girls to relate to him as he thought they should, in their own childlike way. Dodgson's child-friend colluded in this performance of childhood for the adult. His choice not to hide the traces of the photographic process announces his presence in order to disclose not just the look of the child, but also Dodgson's look at the girl and hers back to him.

It is this multiplicity of gazes that Waggoner asserts is apparent on viewing *It Won't Come Smooth* and this is precisely the reason this image is acutely so relevant to this particular research project. In my images of my own children I attempt to incorporate self-reflexivity, my own presence in the photographs which depict my children, Georgia and Henry, without actually including myself in the frame. I do this in a similar fashion to Dodgson by drawing the viewer's attention to pose, gesture, setting and, significantly, the direct gaze of each child. The consequence of Dodgson's own presence in his photographs of children is that as Waggoner (cited in Brown 2002, p158) formulates, it "does not claim the power to reveal childhood in the photograph, but who claims for himself the ability to make the child come out and play." It is my intention to avoid any suggestion that my images reveal an unmediated reflection of childhood, but rather to emphasise the ambiguities and complexities involved in the portrayal of children in photography by utilising

contradictions to produce unstable, less secure possibilities for the reading of the images, and consequently ideas pertaining to childhood as a one-dimensional, fixed, innocent entity.

Dodgson's strange fascinations reinforced speculation that his motivations in friendships with children were dubious and that his photography was employed as an instrument to indulge his perverse voyeuristic passion for the little girls he photographed. Kincaid (1992, p. 303) suggests this when he states, "Lewis Carroll, who was uncommonly gifted in procuring replacement children, lived erotically by way of his camera". However, Hughes Lebailly, whose work focuses on the "Victorian Child Cult", calls for an alternative reading of Dodgson's sexuality. Dodgson's images tap into the cultural anxieties that surround pedophilia and sexual abuse of children. It is important to note that there is no evidence that Dodgson had sexual contact with children. Lebailly (1998, p. 122) argues that "instead of a perverse, repressed, sexual fascination with little girls, Dodgson was merely representative of the majority of artists and writers of the time who revered "the beauty of childhood." However, Catharine Lumby's (1998, p. 53) counter-assertion that "to the modern eye, of course, Dodgson's photographs of children, clothed and naked, offer what seems irrefutable evidence of his erotic interest in children", reflects popular contemporary concerns with Carroll's practice, anxieties which were spectacularly exposed in Australia throughout 2008 when Bill Henson, in an unfortunate parallel with Dodgson, traversed the swamp land of the art versus -porn -debate that persistently bubbles around certain photographs of children.

The closure of Bill Henson's exhibition at the Roslyn Oxley9 gallery in Sydney May 2008 underscored the problematics that continue to accompany the representation of childhood sexuality in photography into the twenty-first century. With fears surrounding child protection exacerbated by internet consumption and distribution, increasingly photographs which portray even partial child nudity, run the risk of being branded child porn. Catharine Lumby (2008, p. 2) maintains that while child pornography is rarely commercially produced "we are living in a time when the spectre of child pornography, stalks even the most innocuous images, a time of profound moral panic about the boundaries between childhood and adulthood." One particular image of Henson's, 'Untitled # 30', which featured on the exhibition invitation, sparked hysteria amongst the media and resulted in police removing the works from the gallery before the opening that same evening after three complaints from the public. The image was indeed unsettling in its portrayal of the emerging sexuality of a pubescent girl, and its use as a marketing tool for the new works challenged the sensibilities of even Henson's most ardent supporters. David Marr (2008, p. 5) in his book *The Henson Case*, which examines the nuances of the arguments that surrounded the debate, states that the photograph revealed "budding breasts, rarely seen and almost never celebrated. In our culture, budding breasts are extraordinarily private. These aren't sacrosanct but Henson had broken a powerful little taboo." Henson's depiction of the girl's nascent womanhood tapped into the

personal and social fears of a supposed increase in the sexualisation of the child and the proliferation of child pornography. Widespread condemnation for Henson's images came rapid fire from child protection advocates, police, politicians, journalists and Prime Minister Kevin Rudd amongst others. The classification board, much to the disappointment of Henson's detractors slapped a meagre PG rating on 'Untitled # 30'. Nevertheless, the episode instigated serious consequences for the creators of childhood photography which are yet to be fully uncovered.

Denise Ferris and Martyn Jolly, art photographers and academics at Australia National University, in a collaborative article for *Art Monthly* June 2008 titled 'Collateral Damage', suggest that the hyperbole of the Henson incident will incur a significant cost as "every photographic act is now more readily viewable through the prism of victim and abuser, than artist and subject" (2008, p. 6). A concern that artists who engage with a more complicated, yet simultaneously richer, vision of childhood, will be stifled because of the over-regulation of child photography. Art photographs of children are more likely to engage with the intensity and the complexities which escort childhood and adolescence than those of conventional visual culture. Ferris and Jolly remain ardent through 'Collateral Damage' that the repression of images by such motivated photographers will have a less than propitious outcome for children and the social and cultural realm that they inhabit.

Polixeni Papetrou is an Australian maternal photographer who desires to express an alternative representation of childhood than that commonly seen in mainstream depictions. Papapetrou in roomnotes for an exhibition at the Australian Centre for Photography (2004), states "people generally want to see children in a romantic or idealised light, untouched by sexuality, power, gender roles and behavioural and moral conformity. So I sometimes feel that I belong to a generation destined to falsify the perception of childhood." American paternal photographer Timothy Archibald echoes Papapetrou's refusal to commit to a sanitised portrayal of childhood when he declares "I've always been confused by photographers who depict the whole child experience with Hallmark Card emotions. I think it short changes both the kids and the parents: it doesn't allow the children the complexity of emotions that they have" (Archibald, 2007, August 13). Significantly art photographs of children often depict the fragility and tensions of existence experienced by adults and children alike. Ferris and Jolly (2008, p. 3) lament that advocates of censorship fail to recognise the value of art photographs when they state, "the world of the over-anxious sees no social role for art, or creativity or expression." Art photographs of children often reconfigure worn out conventions of childhood. They also accommodate contradictions and ambiguities that allow for the emergence of a less certain self upon reading. Consequently the potential for emancipatory seeing in such images outshines those offered by those we are accustomed to see in conventional images.

Unlike maternal photographer Papapetrou who feels compromised by contemporary social expectations of childhood imagery, Cameron brought to bear an alternative vision of childhood but did not undergo the same scrutiny as Dodgson. Despite the implicit sexuality in some of Cameron's photographs of children and the darker proposition she offered for childhood through her representations of the child; Cameron was granted exemption from scrutiny pertaining to child sexualisation in her pictures specifically because of her maternity. As Mavor (1996, p. 25) explains, "Cameron's work has managed to escape the label of 'perversion' that has encumbered Carroll's photographs. Clearly, as the texts on Cameron attest to, she has been saved by her maternal life style". Cameron's immunity, endowed by her maternity, from public debate in the nineteenth century was not echoed in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In America, seminal maternal photographer Sally Mann was publically accused of being a "bad mother". And civic debate was stirred over the 1994 publication of Mann's book *Immediate family*, which featured images of her own children naked and engaged in role-play activities which mimic adult behaviour, such as smoking. Seven years later, in 2001, Tierney Gearon was also slighted with the "bad mother" tag over her own photographs of her children undressed. Gearon's exhibition at the Saatchi Gallery in London was threatened with closure and visited by police who suggested the photographs "could be seized under indecency laws" (Gearon, 2001, p. 1) following minor complaints from the public. Further explication of maternal photography and the change in reactions to maternal photographers since the nineteenth century will follow in chapter four. Fortunately, Julia Margaret Cameron was spared the "bad mother" slur that contemporary maternal photographers have borne since. Consequently Cameron was free to produce complex and contradictory images of childhood that ran counter to the paternalistic innocent images of the time that excluded maternal perspectives. Cameron is recognised by Carol Armstrong (1996, p. 115) for her unconventional maternal legacy:

When one thinks of Victorian images of come-hither children, it is Lewis Carroll that one probably thinks of first, but in fact it is Julia Margaret Cameron, the good-mother and grandmother, who has left us with the more obsessive, the more insistent, and I think the more perverse record of a fascination with the allure of childish bodies.

To contemplate or classify a maternal view of childhood as obsessive and perverse may initially seem alarming. However, like Cameron, I too have actively incorporated the perverse in my photographic practice in the past, in particular, in my 2007 honours project *m/others*, and also in the photographs for this research project. My interest in the perverse is two fold and stems from Julia Kristeva's writing on both *jouissance* and the abject, with both influencing the conventions I use in my photographic practice which, I will discuss in greater detail in chapter five. But to clarify here Kristeva maintains that *jouissance* is closely linked to the abject(that which is cast out) when she says, "*jouissance* alone causes the abject to exist as such. One does not know it, one does not desire it, one joys in it[*on en jouit*]. Violently and painfully. A passion" (1982, p. 9). Roland Barthes

(1980, p. 4) has described *jouissance* as an experience that mixes pleasure and pain. Throughout the images in this project as in *m/others* (Wilkinson, 2007, p. 21), I maintain an allegiance to Kristeva's thought and I "introduce transgression to provide the possibility for pleasure to counteract the sorrow of separation." "A suffering lined with jubilation ambivalence of masochism an account of which a woman, rather refractory to perversion, in fact allows herself a coded, fundamental, perverse behaviour" (Kristeva, 1986, p. 183)." In Cameron's photographs of children I recognise a similar maternal passion, an awareness of her own *jouissance* provided by the perverse. It is a *jouissance* I am gifted with when I view her photographs.

Anne Higonnet (1998) identifies Carol Mavor and Carol Armstrong both art historians who simultaneously published pieces on Cameron's work, as providing opportunities for alternative readings of Cameron's photographs. Mavor and Armstrong bring their own maternal passion to their analysis of Cameron's work: "Both Mavor and Armstrong argue eloquently for a maternally erotic meaning in photograph's like Cameron's" (Higonnet 1998, p. 125). Equally they offer a reinterpretation of conventional, historical and sentimental criticisms of Cameron's childhood imagery in their writing. Mavor's and Armstrong's ideas, which I have previously discussed, offer feminist, maternal interpretations of the works, which provide more complex readings of Cameron's photographs outside the sentimental vision of romantic childhood. Furthermore, Mavor and Armstrong in their recognition of the erotic child, exemplify the way that photography has contributed to the perpetuation of the child as innocent in traditional patriarchal art history and society. Higonnet (1998, p. 126) states:

New, sexualizing interpretations clustered around the Victorian greats render visible a persistent strain in the history of photographs of children. Right through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries winds a tendril of what has to be called photographic passion for children's bodies, passion all the more disquieting because it cannot be treated as a simple perversion of the Romantic ideal, but rather seems to be an intensification of it, visions of innocence heightened by parental and naturist fervor.

Like Mavor and Armstrong, I acknowledge Cameron's maternal passion in one particular striking portrait, *Daisy* (Margaret Louisa Bradley), 1864. Nevertheless, it is not the passion for the child's body that I am drawn towards but the look of the child. This image seizes my gaze because, unlike the majority of her photographs it highlights that Cameron is actively engaged with the child. Often Cameron's images depict fleshy naked children whose gaze is not directed at the camera, despite their visible faces. Higonnet (1998, p. 112) believes that most often in Cameron's photographs "we are the ones to whom the child is ultimately presented for adoration; face, torso, and chubby limbs.... The mother's role is not so much to engage with the child, but to cue our visual engagement." This image is arresting, the print itself is reasonably dark in tone and depicts a little

girl, devilish in appearance who sustains a dark, hooded and unwavering glare into the camera. The child's right hand clutches the collar of what appears to be the neck of her cape. Amanda Hopkinson in *Julia Margaret Cameron* describes the image as "strikingly contemporary" (1986, p. 108). Certainly the look of the little girl does not adhere to the convention of the Romantic innocent child, despite the surface quality of the reproduction, which is a slightly fuzzy, grainy, dust-speckled black and white photograph. What gives the portrait its potency is the apparent awareness in the girl of her power. It is unabashedly transmitted through her steely gaze and defiant pout. This unflinching attitude that Daisy presents to Cameron gives the portrait the 'contemporary look' that is recognised by Hopkinson. It is the apparent knowingness of the girl in this image that grabs my attention, for it recalls my own maternal awareness and a strange fascination with the child that I recognise when I photograph my own children.

Knowing: Crisis or opportunity?

"There is a pervasive sense that childhood is in crisis in the late twentieth century" (Cox, 1996, p. 163).

Daisy's knowing look can be compared with Higonnet's definition of the "Knowing child" which she believes became evident in the late twentieth century. Higonnet (1998, p. 207) explains how she came to this describe the "Knowing child":

The 'Knowing child', in honor of Henry James's 1887 novel *What Maisie Knew*, the story of a child who understood rather more about adults' motives and foibles than their belief in her innocence allowed them to guess. Maisie, a child of the Victorian age, was very much ahead of her time. In the late twentieth century, many children are Maisies. These Knowing children have bodies and passions of their own. They are also often aware of adult bodies and passions, whether as mimics or only witnesses.

Like James's Maisie, Cameron's Daisy was before her time, and this becomes clear if we apply Higonnet's qualification that the "Knowing child" blossomed from the increasingly complex and layered images produced by photographers in the late twentieth century. Higonnet's (1998, p. 207) belief that a consideration of changes "in ideas about who makes art and who takes care of children" may help reveal the progressive and alternative portrayals of children that followed *Daisy* in the late twentieth century. Historically, art production has been, in the main a male pursuit, while women have been assigned the role of caregivers to children. These two practices were rarely mutual until recent decades. "The mothers who once had few creative outlets can now express their experience, while the fathers who deemed parenting a pretty dull subject are finding it more

challenging than they had imagined” (Higonnet 1998, p. 207). Overwhelmingly, it is mothers who continue to photograph their children in the early 21st century.

Some father photographers, such as Emmet Gowin in the 1970’s and Timothy Archibald since 2007, have taken intimate portraits of their children which align them with a maternal approach. Archibald runs an Internet blog that displays an ongoing series of images he is taking of his autistic son titled *Echolilia*. In his blog, Archibald maintains the photographs are the result of a collaborative practice and uses the site to discuss the photographic process, his relationship with his son, and his own feelings regarding the complexities of fatherhood. The site is also used to exhibit the work of other photographers and, in particular, images of children taken by their parents. Archibald (2009, June, 24) discusses the collaboration between himself and his son Elijah:

For me the work is about a relationship, and I always think of a relationship having three components: him, myself, and then all that is shared...the shared intangible. With the project I always saw the photographs as what we did together, the scans as my voice, looking objectively at the documents, and then the thing we get when we look at all of the stuff together is the channel, the tone that defines the project...the echolilia thing. There are feelings that go along with your relationships with your kids: powerlessness, idealism, and just these moments when those you are raising just seem so alien...so foreign. And moments of transcendent beauty as well. In doing a series about a relationship, I didn’t want to short change it, or dumb it down. I wanted it to have the complexity of emotions, the range, and try to touch on the emotions we don’t have the words for yet.

Archibald and Gowin, both male photographers, express sensibilities that align them to the French feminist perspective proffered by Helene Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva: a trio who expand on and deviate from patriarchal psychoanalytic theories which privilege male subjectivity. Each articulates the potency of the maternal experience between mother and child in order to accentuate the importance of the pre verbal in cultural discourse. On Kristeva, Cixous and Irigaray, Silverman Van Bruren (1989, p. 9) states:

They propose that the metaphor of maternity and of the mother’s body locates a richer meaning that precedes the signs of language...The French school trio applies the metaphors of the madonna, maternite, *écriture féminine*, and Kristeva’s notion of the infant semiotic to explore the nature, function and power of the mother’s body and mind in relation to the mother and infant’s experience of pregnancy, birth and nursing. They suggest that the potency and efficacy of the mothers early mental symbiosis and the archaic hermeneutics of that relationship are the wellspring of culture; but they charge that the emotions and values associated with these deep states of mind have been dammed and barred from the symbolic discourse of society and civilisation.

Archibald's photographs of his autistic son are aligned with a maternal perspective that prioritises emotions and is linked to pre-symbolic language. Archibald himself reinforces this inextricable link when he states that his work references a "complexity of emotions... we don't have words for yet". Consequently, Archibald recognises that the structured, symbolic language that upholds the Law of the Father fails to satisfactorily express the depths of his parental relationship with his son, which is better accessed by a maternal, unspoken recognition of complicated emotion: a maternal passion. Archibald's comment alludes to an unconscious affiliation with Julia Kristeva's maternal passion and recognition of the feminine semiotic relationship that exists between mother and child pre symbolic language. The photographic process between Archibald and his son is more aligned to Kristeva's maternal, semiotic *chora* than the structural rigidity of patriarchal symbolic language. As referenced in *m/others*, I too, utilise the camera to engage in a semiotic relationship with my own children. And like Archibald I understand the potential of the photographic process to allow a particular mode of communication outside of the limits of symbolic language between mother and child, or in Archibald's case, father and child.

Prior to Archibald, in the nineteen sixties and seventies another significant father photographer, Emmitt Gowin, also photographed his own children with a maternal awareness. One particular photograph of Gowin's, *Nancy, Danville, Virginia, 1969*, calls for the application of Cixous's (cited in Segarra, 2010,p.32) comment "censor the body and you censor breath and speech at the same time. Write yourself. Your body must be heard". Many women embrace Cixous's statement as a mantra for emancipation and an encouragement of the expression of female experience. Gowin's photograph of his daughter Nancy references what Cixous knew about the power of the female body. The image reveals a little girl wearing a nightgown standing in a garden. Her head is flung back, eyes closed, her expression reveals that she is overtaken by the moment. She is serene yet solid, satisfied with the flexibility of her body as she holds what appears to be an impossible pose. Her bare arms contorted, she presents two eggs, held in her hands, to the camera. This complicated image depicts a palpable strength in the little girl's body. Gowin, when discussing the image in *Bomb* 1997, stated:

I always felt that life did that to both of us. It used her body to teach her, and it used her to teach me. Perception comes out of your own body. We don't have a mind separate from our bodies. I am somebody who thinks that their body knows just as much as any thought they ever had. And I like for my body to listen to my mind when it has a good idea.

Gowin's comment is incisive and reflects an awareness of the acuity of the body and its potential as a device for subversion in the photographic text. This depiction of a small girl by her father highlights the ambiguous and particularly complex potential of the photographic text to create alternative possibilities for subjectivity within relationships of difference. Gowin recognises the

influence of his own body over his perception and also the power of his daughter's body over him as Nancy acts as a mentor to instruct Gowin's own way of seeing. Cixous, when interviewed by Susan Sellers in 2004 (2008, p. 176), spoke of the potential for self-recognition in reciprocal interaction with the other: "this exposure to the other takes the form of acquiescence: what translates, for you, in terms of powerlessness, is for me, a power that accepts submission, infinite acceptance ...you arrive (to yourself) where you were not expecting (yourself)." The collapse of the distinction between self and other occurs between Gowin and Nancy in the photographic process, which allows a disruption of particular power relations between parent and child, and subsequently provides liberatory possibilities.

Gowin succinctly articulates the potential of the inverse play of power relations depicted in this photograph to invent alternative subjectivities for both adult and child other than those prescribed by traditional models of the adult as teacher and child as student. Gowin's photograph of his daughter Nancy reflects Higonnet's assertion that "the more innovative and ambitious pictures of Knowing children are made by the adults who know them intimately, usually their parent" (1998, p. 208). I celebrate the conditions of potential this research provides for self-recognition via reciprocal engagement with my children. Like Gowin, I endeavour to create the possibility of a mutual acceptance between my children and myself by depicting the complex childhood subjectivities via the extraordinarily complicated photographic process. According to Faulkner (2011, p. 50), "childhood innocence is seen to be vulnerable ...because it stands in for a value its very existence destroys. It is, in Freud's terms, a fetish: an illusion that substitutes for a lack. And as such childhood is an unstable ideal." Nevertheless, while I am affiliated with father photographers Gowin and Archibald in some ways, my photographs also reflect the maternal relationship and my 'maternal passion' which is informed by theory that supports the significance of the maternal body. The images I make, then, deliver complex visions of the mother-child relationship and 'maternal passion', providing more meaningful and potent ideas about childhood. Hence, the photographs of Georgia and Henry in this project refuse any singular, fixed ideals on the innocence and purity of ideal childhood that remain social chimeras.

Chapter Four

Controversy

“For photographs to accuse, and possibly to alter conduct, they must shock” (Sontag, 2003 p. P72).

The most recent controversy in the child sexualisation and photography debate in Australia resulted in the cancellation of a charity art auction at the Sydney Children’s Hospital in January 2011. A photographic submission by maternal artist Del Kathryn Barton of her shirtless six -year old son, created the disturbance because it failed to adhere to the hospital’s stringent rules on the use of images of children. This controversy follows similar 2008 objections to art photographs of children exhibited and published in Australia by Bill Henson and maternal art photographer Polixeni Papapetrou. Such strident reaction to Del Kathryn Barton’s image reveals the ongoing and widespread anxiety felt by the public over photographic images of children. And the debate stirred by these recent Australian works mirrors similar public controversy that has previously raged over images of children in other Western countries by maternal photographers.

Significantly, as previously discussed in an earlier chapter, American maternal photographer Sally Mann drew public scrutiny and condemnation in 1987 over naked pictures of her own children, as did Tierney Gearon, more than a decade later in 2001. Gearon’s photographs of her children displayed in The Saatchi Gallery in London were removed from the gallery and Gearon was threatened with criminal charges. Like Mann and Gearon, Papapetrou drew emotional and wide-ranging responses from politicians, child protection agencies and other community critics with an image of her daughter Olympia, which was published on the July 2008 cover of *Art Monthly* magazine. The commotion both past and present, which surrounds images of children taken by maternal and other art photographers raises multiple, complex and competing arguments around the rights of children, censorship, freedom of expression and acceptable social, cultural, moral and ethical codes relating to childhood.

Art debates/moral panics

The level of public concern about the representation of children in art photography is reflected not only in the recent Henson controversy but also in a current Senate inquiry into the Australian film and literature classification scheme. The Senate referred the inquiry pertaining to the portrayal of children in art works to the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee for inquiry and report in November 2010. The report from the Committee will determine legislation relating to the application of the National Classification Scheme, to works of art and the role of artistic merit in classification decisions. Submissions to the Committee from multiple individuals, academics, artists, arts

agencies, religious groups, child protection agencies and other organizations reflect the disparate and conflicting positions that make a balanced debate difficult to achieve. Many members of the art community are concerned that the outcome of the inquiry may further limit artists who create images of children into their practice. Tamara Winikoff, Executive Director of the National Association for the Visual Arts (NAVA) at a public hearing of the Senate Committee on April 27th 2011, called for a considered assessment of only contentious art works, which require classification. Those art works which require classification should be, according to Winikoff (2011) “measured against criteria agreed through consultation with a panel of art experts; and assessed away from the influence of political populism, the self interest of ideological special interest groups and media hype.” Winikoff’s request flags her concern at the moral panic which has built concerning recent art photographs of children.

In his book *Folk devils and moral panics*, first published in 1972, Stanley Cohen develops the term ‘moral panic’s’ to describe social reactions to deviant behaviour, particularly in youth culture. Cohen (1980, p. 1) states:

Societies appear to be the subject, every now and then, to periods of moral panic. A condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right thinking people.

In agreement with Cohen regarding moral panics are Erich Goode and Nachman Ben-Yehudaan (2009, p p. 16-19) who assert that “from time to time in every society, charges of terrible and dastardly deeds by evildoers erupt; sides are chosen... enemies are named.... The role of sexuality in the moral panic calls for close attention.” Indeed, it was the 2008 Henson debate that prompted Duncan Fine (2008, p. 1) to declare “the great moral panic of our age — kids and s-x.” Furthermore, according to Faulkner (2011, p.44), it was the framing of the Henson debate in the media that failed to generate a balanced discussion. Faulkner (2011) believes that conflicting boundaries were drawn to divide arguments about child protection and from discussions of freedom of artistic expression, which made a central position difficult. Subsequently, according to Faulkner (2011, p p 44-45):

because of this over-determination of the lines of argument and of allegiance under the rubric of child sexualisation, an opportunity was missed to critically reflect upon such feelings of ambivalence about Henson’s photographs and what they tell us about the work ideals of childhood innocence do for adult formations of identity and desire.

Thus, as Faulkner articulates the art vs child pornography debate that occurred during the Henson case, which continues to resurface in the public arena, does little to extend any meaningful

discussion about unsettling images of children. Instead, the consistent rehearsal of a polarised debate, merely reiterates the same old worn out themes around child photography controversies that reverberate in fellow England and America. Such debate seems to reflect the chasm between adult desires for childhood and the reality of childhood for children. If adults could envisage or connect to a memory of childhood, which may contribute to a responsible adult encounter that accommodates a complicated vision of childhood then an acknowledgement of childhood autonomy seems possible. Nevertheless photographs of childhood continue to create panic because as Faulkner (2011, p. 52) states “depicting as it does the passing of childhood, the photograph continues to unsettle the viewer, and to challenge their own attachment to the idea that children should remain free of political interest and desire, even when it is their own.”

Adult failure to accept and acknowledge the complex opportunities of childhood, animates Kincaid’s (1998, p. 8) critical question, “what happens to us and to our children as we tell our stories of the child and of sexuality?” Yet, in the digital age, where images of childhood are catapulted through cyber space and accessibility to dangerous material on the Internet demands scrutiny, Kincaid’s question seems particularly poignant, though it remains unanswered. The repression of art and a suspicion of artists, who provoke inquiry into societal conventions, can have negative consequences for the community. And, more significantly, as Kleinhans (2004, p. 17) suggests, “attention to image material diverts concerns for, and resources from, actual child abuse incidents.” Hence, controversy over the portrayal of children obscures real cases of child abuse. On the ramifications of artistic muzzling, Perkin (2008) quotes Tamara Winikoff, director of the National association for the Visual Arts, who states that, “it’s when you start being worried about repression, and when opinion and intellectual debate is being quarantined or closed down. The consequences are very serious, not just for art but for intellectual and social development.” While the welfare of children is a serious concern, which requires careful attention, especially in the age of the internet, public uproar and mainstream media frenzy fails to adequately engage with the potential of the artist, in particular with the maternal art photographer, to contribute to a considered philosophical discussion on the boundaries, ideas and ethical principles of the representation of childhood.

“Photo Finished” the headline for the October 2–3, 2010 edition of *The Weekend Australian Review*, warns of a potentially grim future for art photography and follows a similarly dire 2009 prediction “Childhood’s end in the picture,” in the same publication the previous year. Mistrust of photographers and public anxiety about the images they make, particularly of children, often develops into open hostility and sometimes results in criminal charges being laid against the artist. Rosemary Neill (2010, p. 1) believes that “art photographers are increasingly frustrated by a climate of regulation and suspicion.” Furthermore, Neill (2010) also argues that despite becoming an

increasingly “narcissistic” and multimedia driven society where voyeurism is cultivated by reality television, Facebook and Twitter, professional photographers face an unprecedented level of social scrutiny. Fears of recrimination, uncertainty over issues of consent and the enforcement of strict protocols for working with children in the arts make it difficult for photographers to practice in collaboration with children. Indeed, executive director of the National Association for the Visual Arts, Tamara Winikoff (cited in Neill, 2010. p. 8) states that “ Australia is absolutely witnessing an erosion of photographers’ rights to freedom of expression.” Much of the recent public controversy around images of children in Australia was whipped to a peak with the well- documented Bill Henson saga, which saw his 2008 exhibition opening closed by the police over the depiction of child nudity. David Marr in *The Henson case* (2008, p. 58) describes the Henson dispute as “an unprecedented purge of the art world.” Nevertheless, while the level of public commotion in 2008 over the depiction of child nudity in Henson’s photographs may be unparalleled, maternal photographers have previously borne the brunt of public outrage without the level of support afforded Henson by the arts’ community.

A Perth-based maternal photographer, Concetta Petrillo, suffered the consequences of the social vigilance which surrounds images of children when charged by Western Australian police in 1995 with indecently recording a child under the age of thirteen years. Petrillo, a university student at the time of her arrest, submitted her film to a local photographic laboratory for development and when she returned to collect her negatives was followed and apprehended following a complaint by the laboratory to the police. For Petrillo, this marked the beginning of a two– year nightmare where the seriousness of the charge was amplified by a lack of support from art power brokers. According to Allison Archer (1999, p. 2), “Concetta found very little assistance from Perth art institutions, including the University where she was enrolled as a student at the time of her arrest, nor from people with the power to make a difference.” Unlike Bill Henson, who was backed by the well-connected and established Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery that represents him, Petrillo was left to defend herself with the support of only a few individuals and subsequently accrued significant legal costs, despite eventually being declared not guilty of the charge. Mother artists, like Concetta Petrillo, who dwell outside of the cocoon of the arts establishment, are not only punished with social scrutiny but remain further disadvantaged from a lack of recognition in male-dominated art institutions.

Throughout the portrayal of childhood in photography where maternal photographers have progressively turned their attention, evidence of ‘mother blame’ illuminates public anxiety over mothers photographing their children. Ferris (2005, p. 1) argues “when maternal photographers publically exhibit photographs of their children, there is a malleability of meaning ... which contributes to a deep uncertainty about such a public display inciting ‘mother blame’ as a consequence ... the mother/artist particularly is taken to task.” Although Concetta Petrillo’s case

was particularly acute, the list of controversial maternal photographers is considerable and therefore supports the idea that maternal photographers are especially criticised. Sally Mann's images of her children in the now notorious publication *Immediate family* (1991) were the first to generate public outrage, and while Mann was not charged, she drew accusations that the images of her children were pornographic. Mann's images depict the contradictions of childhood, refusing to fix it as a singular category. The 'malleability of meaning' produced in Mann's photographs of her three children, like other maternal photographer's images, creates an instability between childhood sexuality and innocence which is not easily received in the public arena. According to Jane Fletcher (1998, p. 2), Mann's work:

reflects the the contemporary concerns about child abuse and the nature of childhood. More often than not, criticism of her photographs has occupied two diametrically opposed positions regarding the censorship of images in relationship to exploitation and abuse of children. Such criticism has tended to negate the subtlety of Mann's work. Sally Mann's representations of childhood depict child sexuality and innocence. This duality is important and representative of a series of dualities present in the making of and content of her photographs.

It is the conflicting dynamics inherent in Mann's images that fails to rest comfortably in the social realm where the representation of children provokes an anxiety for children's safety and the suspicion of the maternal photographer. Edge and Baylis (2004, p. 84) agree when they state that "what emerged in the media coverage of *Immediate family* was a charge of pornography based on notions of maternal irresponsibility, but no opening up of a debate on what mother child relations constitute as an alternative way of seeing and reading." As I have argued in previous chapters, a maternal approach to photographing children, which acknowledges Kristeva's theories and a 'heretical' or '*photographie féminine*' approach, is more likely to produce photographs that allow open interpretation. Mann's photographs, like many made by maternal photographers, are more likely to result in uncertain readings, which disturb and therefore generate debate. The subversive potential of the maternal photographer is recognized by Maurice O'Riordan (2008) when he states that "the transgression of the artist-mother-especially one who dares to implicate her own child in the process- can cut deeper than any questions surrounding the male gaze as a domain for art and exploitation." The ambiguous pleasures of the maternal bond are magnified in photographs of children taken by their mothers, often via the representation of the coexistence of beauty and menace. Nevertheless, images of this register continue to induce fear and suspicion, which fail to acknowledge mutual recognition between mother and child, because they represent the uncertain.

Tierney Gearon's 2001 images of her children, which were exhibited at the Saatchi Gallery in London as part of the *I am a camera* exhibition, created controversy when two images were removed from the show after public complaints. Like Mann's, Gearon's images also generate fear.

Edge and Baylis (2004,77) suggest that, “precisely because the viewer was uncertain about how to interpret Gearon’s photographs that a ‘terror’ became attached to them, one which links them to the widespread cultural need to ‘fix’ definitions in order to allay the anxiety of difference.” Roland Barthes (1977) established in the ‘Rhetoric of the Image’ the ‘polysemic’ quality of the photograph, which denies the possibility of fixed meaning. It is this ‘polysemy’, which creates the potential for public disturbance. Barthes (1977, p. 5) argues, “in every society various techniques are developed intended to fix the floating chain of signifiers...to counter the terror of uncertain signs.” Subsequently, because of the photograph’s apparent ability to produce a slippage of meaning, context should play a significant role in how a photograph is received. Alan Sekula (cited in Goldberg, 1981, p. 453) asserts “the meaning of any photographic message is necessarily context-determined” and this point is crucial for a proper understanding of the photographs message.

Allmark suggests that her work generates different meanings depending on the context of its reception. Allmark (cited in Spencer, 2011, p 37) states “within the art forum at times it tends to lose its textual political base, as images are open to be read in many ways, and the images may be rendered within a passive aesthetic status.” Thus Allmark (2011) believes that any intended purpose cannot be guaranteed and her images may be read under various frameworks according to their placement or delivery within different institutions. While controversial images of childhood require critical analysis, which acknowledges their contribution to social discourses about the construction of childhood and art, it is impossible to fix the inherent meanings of an image and, therefore, context facilitates surrender to uncertainty.

On the SBS *Insight* series June 2008 episode titled ‘the Naked Eye’, which examines the controversial images of childhood, context was repeatedly raised as significant indicator to measure the offensive potential of a photograph. In a discussion on the image of a naked thirteen-year-old girl used on Bill Henson’s exhibition invitation that caused public outrage presenter, Jenny Brockie asked Anthony Bond, Chief Curator with the Art Gallery of New South Wales, “do you understand why some people might be discomforted by those images?” Bond replied, “particularly if they’re taken out of context and that’s the problem and it was that image going out on the web and being presented to people that created a fuss, I think, which was inappropriate.” Bond, who had purchased two of Henson’s works from the controversial series, recognised that the image became problematic when seen outside of the context of art discourse.

Edge and Bayliss (2004) also recognise the significance of context and are critical of Gearon for failing to acknowledge the importance of context when defending her images against claims of indecency. According to Edge and Baylis (2004, p. 80), “debt to a critically informed feminist practice is... both unacknowledged and denied on a number of levels, first by Gearon who seems

to take little responsibility for understanding her actual practice as a photographer.” Furthermore the shift of Gearon’s images from initially conceived as private family photographs to public art gallery was significant. Edge and Baylis (2004, p. 80) are also critical of Charles Saatchi, the gallery owner who exhibited the images when they claim, “he even anticipated how this shift of context would work upon the photographs to create controversy and to increase publicity and the value of the work.” Gearon’s defence of her images might have been less cynically observed if she contextualised her practice by engaging with feminist discourses on maternity, childhood and domestic photography.

Feminism, maternal exposures and the ‘eyes’ of the law

When Sally Mann published ravishing nude photographs of her own children in 1987, there was an immediate outcry; absurdly enough, her appreciation of her children’s physical beauty was seen as both paedophilic and incestuous, as if any mother could be unaware of the tragic loveliness of the bodies she has made within her own and must reconcile herself to losing to time and distance (Germaine Greer, 2003, p. 243).

Throughout 1970s and 1980s feminists increasingly utilised photography as a mechanism for social criticism, documenting the domestic realm and exhibiting the images publically to create apposition around the ‘personal as political’. The camera became a means of self-expression and consciousness raising which, according to Moore (1991, p. 2), enabled a critique of social relationships from a personal- political perspective. Edge and Baylis concur that “historically, photography within the domestic sphere allowed women to explore areas of their lives that stood outside or challenged dominant discourses.” Edge and Baylis (2004, p. 87) believe that by failing to situate her practice within feminism, Gearon negates “the very political nature of these personal images” which consequently leaves her work open to criticism and claims of child sexualisation. Both Mann and Gearon’s images of their children provoked an public outcry of sexualisation claims, though Gearon drew further criticism because her work “disallows either an artistic displacement or feminist defence of their sexualized meanings” (Edge and Baylis 2004, p. 87). Furthermore, Gearon’s (2001, p. 1) claim that “I never went to art school, and have no formal training in photography” subsequently contributes to accusations that her photographs signify in sexualized terms. In contrast, Mann’s images demonstrate a clear connection with art history, and can be seen as an acknowledgement of the ‘personal is political’ feminist movement, which conceived a complex set of discourses for maternal photographers to cultivate and use to counter controversy.

When interviewed in 2007, Jessie Mann (2007), daughter of Sally Mann and unquestionably one of the most well-known children to have been photographed naked by their mother, states that “when the flap about my mother’s work occurred what shocked me most was that the public rarely thought

to assume that we might have really enjoyed making art with our mother.” Rather than damaging children, an artistic, photographic collaboration between mother and child can strengthen the mother–child bond. Eleven-year-old Olympia Papapetrou (2008) believes that the collaboration with her mother in the picture that upset Kevin Rudd when it appeared on the cover of *Art Monthly Australia*, Issue 211, July 2008, was a positive experience. Olympia said when interviewed by *Herald Sun* reporter Carly Crawford (2008), “I love the photo so much.... I think that the picture my mum took of me had nothing to do with being abused and I think nudity can be a part of art.” Often images of children taken by their mother are a collaborative and mutual process. However, Polixeni Papapetrou (cited in Power, 2009, p. 175) believes:

We’re not really into celebrating childhood...That’s where the problem lies. perhaps photographing my children has caused some controversy. Some people over- emphasise the act of photographing children, even by the mother, and want to sensationalise it. But I think that parents and their children have a right to express child identity; and it’s really unhealthy if the whole community forecloses on childhood and innocence because of insecurity and paranoia.

In a paper delivered at a 2008 Bureau of Ideas symposium in Perth, academic Rex Butler engages with Papapetrou’s images of her daughter with a nuanced approach that draws on a feminist reading of the photograph. Butler acknowledges the intimate and complex processes of looking between mother and child and rather than finding fault with the images, instead problematises the way the images are publically received. According to Butler (2008, p. 5):

What we see in the eyes of the model, what Papapetrou is trying to figure in these works, is if I can put it this way the ultimate obscenity in our culture, that which cannot be shown or has no way off being represented (which is also why Papapetrou does not show it as such). It is the love between a mother and her child. What Papapetrou is attempting to photograph is not only her child’s look on to her but her look on to the child.

The exchange of the look between mother and daughter in the image recalls Irigaray (cited in Ingman 1998, p. 34) who states that “in a sense we need to establish a woman-woman relationship of reciprocity with our mothers, in which they might possibly also feel themselves to be our daughters.” Unlike Henson’s images of children, Papapetrou’s photographs, like many of those taken by maternal photographers, feature a direct visual connection between mother/photographer and child/subject. Jessie Mann recognises the power of the maternal look and says, “my mother has no blinders on, she will always look intensely upon whatever is closest to her” (cited in Roberts, 2005, p. 1). This direct look facilitates mutual recognition between mother and child, which expresses an understanding of the reciprocity of love and also provides an opportunity for subjective exploration of the complexity of the maternal relationship. According to Butler (2008, p. 6), “what Papapetrou is trying to do in these images is imagine herself looking back at her mother

by means of her child looking back at her.” It is the complexity and intensity of the processes of looking involved in the maternal gaze that is not easily received in the public domain and that contributes to the controversial reception of intimate images of childhood. Indeed Pollock (1988) asserts, particularly in art history where different gendered visions exist in a hierarchy when she asserts, that “we cannot ignore the fact that the terrains of artistic practice and of history are structured in, and structuring of, gender power relations” (Pollock, 1988, p. 55). Consequently, it is the male masculine gaze that has shaped aesthetic discourse, and maternal images of children create controversy because they subvert the socially accepted masculinised way of seeing.

The objections to Papapetrou's image of a partially naked Olympia on the cover of *Art Monthly Australia*, which focused on the anxiety over child protection issues, occludes an engagement with and indicates the social anxiety around maternal passion, “the ultimate obscenity in our culture” (Butler, 2008, p.5). Moore (1991, p. 136) states that, “the maternal body, site of cultural taboos and inarticulate pleasures, has been for centuries an object of medical, religious, scientific, administrative and aesthetic anxiety.” Butler agrees when he recounts Luce Irigaray's argument that “what constitutes our society is the exclusion or repression of the mother-child relationship”(Butler, 2008, p. 5). The socially produced fear of the maternal relationship, is further acknowledged by maternal photographer Papapetrou (cited in Power, 2008, p. 1):

Sometimes I think that I am viewed more critically because I am a mother and an artist who photographs her children.... Motherhood is a jealously guarded concept, and when a mother works with her children and creates an artwork of the child, that causes anxiety in the community. The photographic act is seen as somehow supplanting the archetype mother, with the consequence of me neglecting my maternal duty. It is as if the child has been turned over to objectification, because some exclusive and private intimacy between myself and my child has been breached.

Australian society's unwillingness to acknowledge the intensity of the maternal relationship was expressed clearly by Australia's then PM Kevin Rudd (2008) who declared that he could not stand the photograph and that such images don't “let kids be kids”. Rudd's criticism of Papapetrou's photograph echoed his previous description of Henson's work as ‘revolting’. Nevertheless, Butler (2008), Winikoff (2008), Greer (2008) and Millner (2010) concur that such sensational responses from Rudd and other child protection advocates which attempt to silence artists who interrogate convention, ethics and meaning, risk contributing to the conditions they deplore. Dr Jacqueline Millner (cited in Neill, 2010, p. 8) argues:

the moral panic around child pornography shuts down images of children to their lowest common denominator, and this we need to passionately resist... it is vital

to remember that the history of photography is full of images of children, naked and clothed, whose meaning is not reducible to the erotic or sexual.. restricted to being fodder for the paedophilic imagination.

In contrast to the prevailing discussions around artistic imagery of children, research suggests the link between art photographs of children and paedophilic behaviour is weak. Clinical and research director of Griffith Youth Forensic Service, Professor Stephen Smallbone, says that “there is a wide assumption that viewing images of children in a sexual setting is likely to lead to the motivation to sexually abuse a child in a physical sense ...that assumption is not borne out by the evidence” (cited in Worthington, 2008). Images that can actually be defined as pornographic are usually hidden and not necessarily easy to define, while publically visible images that create controversy are feared for potentially inciting paedophilic desire. According to Lumby (1998, p. 48), “when police arrest someone for possessing child pornography, they’re usually referring to a category of material most people have never seen... Child pornography...is material which has to be diligently sourced or produced in a covert environment – material whose content is unambiguous.” Nevertheless, while the content of material, possessed by those who are charged and prosecuted for child pornography offences is ‘unambiguous’, what constitutes indecency in art photographs remains difficult to pin down, precisely because of its ambiguity.

Chuck Kleinhans (2004, p. 22) maintains that, “the law increasingly allows for cases to be decided on the basis of sexual image interpretation, while defining ‘sexually suggestive’ is always a subjective judgement call.” Australian laws related to offences of child pornography are also open to interpretation and laws differ slightly between states. In Western Australian the law states:

The *Classification Act* creates offences relating to child pornography (13). Child pornography is defined as an article that describes or depicts, in a manner that is likely to cause offence to a reasonable adult, a person who is, or who looks like, a child under the age of sixteen, whether or not the child (or person who looks like a child) is engaged in a sexual activity at the time(14). An ‘article’ includes a film, photograph, publication, object, sound recording or advertisement (15).... This broad definition could potentially include a wide range of artistic works depicting young people. The courts will assess whether it constitutes child pornography by reference to its understanding of a reasonable adult’s response – which may or may not be the same as to the views of the artistic community, art connoisseurs and the child’s family.

As both the Petrillo and Henson cases demonstrate, the application of the law in Australia which uses subjective terms like “reasonable adult’s response” is problematic and permits grounds for complaint that are open to interpretation. In a discussion aired on SBS television program *Insight The Naked Eye* (2008) Allen Leek, a serving member of the Australian Police Force for 34 years and art gallery owner, agrees that terms are subjective when he says that police sometimes act on

complaints without “using independent discretion” (cited in Worthington, 2008). Furthermore, Leek (cited in Worthington 2008) believes that despite the subjective terms once classified by the classification board “the law is quite clear... either before or after the alleged commission of an offence of showing pornography, if the work is then classified, that's a defence to the alleged breach.” However, If an artwork is RC (refused classification) the artwork will be censored and the defendant liable to be charged with the offence. Despite the authority of the classification board to determine whether censorship will apply Arts Law Centre Online, (2011) maintains that, “it can be extremely difficult to predict with any degree of certainty whether a particular work will be considered obscene. Determination of what is offensive and what are contemporary community standards involves highly subjective assessments.” While the risk of censorship for artists is extreme and has significant ramifications for their professional practice, the consequences of being charged, as in Concetta Petrillo's case, are catastrophic.

According to David Marr's Watch on Censorship (2008), fears about the circulation of images of children for dubious purposes have been significantly amplified in digital age because of the internet. Marr (2008, p. 1) asserts:

I think what's happening here at the moment is that there is an attempt to set up a new taboo because it will be believed that it's useful in the fight against paedophilia and that there be a new taboo in the community against the photographing of naked children. Now that's new and it goes against the history of art, it goes against the history of photography, it's new, and whether it is actually useful in the fight against paedophilia - I'm by no means convinced either.

Marr's belief that 'new taboo', which works against the portrayal of children in photography because of fears of an increase of pedophilic imagery on the Internet lacks substance. It is further questioned by Assoc. Professor Brian Simpson. According to Simpson “the vast majority of sexual abuse of children, of course happens within the family, and people related to that person. You know, we might probably in that sense be more concerned with what's actually in the family album.” It is well established that even innocuous images of children are fodder for the pedophilic imagination and therefore it is difficult to monitor what actually constitutes child sexualisation. Moreover, as Edge and Baylis (2004, p. 87) contest “art, porn, sexuality, childhood and adulthood are all cultural constructions that shift and change and as such have no fixed meaning.” Therefore, censorship of photographs of children's bodies based on fear that the readings will be necessarily linked to paedophilia shuts down the intellectual engagement that art often facilitates. Images of children by maternal photographers can work against sexual readings and Power (2009, p. 175) cites Katrina Strickland in *The Australian* who comments that, “the fact that women artists are producing images that record the sensory aspects of childhood can be seen as a rebellion of a

prurient world view.” Hence, maternal images of childhood can work to disrupt the possibility of sexualised readings that constellate around the bodies of children.

Maternal photographers who integrate the family into their photographic practice often actively strive against conservative and conventional ideologies of the family despite the potential for controversy. Unlike most family snap shots, maternal photographs often question and resist anodyne representations of perpetual family unity. In *Family frames* Marianne Hirsch, argues the majority of family photographs sustain the “imaginary cohesion” of the family unit and that ‘photography’s social functions are integrally tied to the ideology of the modern family. The family photo both displays the cohesion of the family and is an instrument of its togetherness” (Hirsch, 1997, p. 7). In contrast, maternal photographers utilise photography to scrutinise, observe and interrogate ideas of the family which are often ignored or concealed. They raise questions about how power circulates within the family and develop a dialogue on the complications of family life. Furthermore, maternal frames provide the opportunity for a heterogeneous vision of family life so often denied in conventional familial imagery. Hirsch (1997, p. 7) believes that “photographs can become powerful weapons of social and attitudinal change”. Thus images, which challenge long – held ideals and social functions, create cultural unrest. According to Kleinhans (2004, p. 29):

Society faces the dilemma that child sexual abuse most often takes place within the family or extended family, and that it is hidden by the family, by an interlocking set of issues of privacy, protection of the family, and patriarchal privilege. It is easier to find images than to determine actual abuse.

When the majority of child sexual abuse is said to be committed within the family, the dangers of censoring images which disrupt and question the myth of the ideal family are considerable. I argue that photographs of children by maternal photographers reveal tensions that develop debate and a greater understanding of the complexities of family life, resisting the reproduction of naturalised cultural practices.

While maternal photographers may work to generate images that provide critical engagement with notions of childhood and the maternal relationship, it is important to consider that meaning in the photograph can never be fixed. Hirsch (1997, p. 1) comments that “multiple looks circulate in the photograph’s production, reading and description.” Indeed, Barthes examined the complexities involved in reading the photograph in *Camera Lucida* (1984) where, according to Barthes, both the ‘studium’ and the ‘punctum’ contribute to any photographic reading. The studium is linked to a cultural examination that can be defined while the punctum is a unique, subjective response “punctum is also: stain, speck, cut, little hole ... and also a cast of the dice.” The uncertainty of any

reading of a photograph and its subsequent potential to 'wound' generates fear that intimate images of childhood can contribute the child as a sexual fantasy for the predatory adult look.

Fears surrounding photographs of the child's body and in particular, the child's naked body, as sexually exploitative are accentuated when the images are transported from the private realm of the familial home to the public domain of the art gallery. It is significant that images of children taken by adults are necessarily endowed with adult concerns that often speak of greater narratives other than just childhood itself. Lumby (1998, p. 54) states that "when we examine photographs of children we invariably invest them with adult desires." Patricia Pace (1999, p. 341) agrees that "the questions about who took the photographs, in what setting, with what child's or parent's consent, for what purpose, and under whose control it is finally disseminated are the important issues." As I have discussed in detail in a previous chapter, the discourse of childhood sexuality operates according to a particular set of power relations, which favours the adult and is therefore difficult to reconcile. Edge and Bayliss (2004, p.79) assert "that what adults understand as the sexuality of children is always defined by the adult world... childhood is not fixed but is culturally produced." Thus many representations of childhood could be said to present a particular adult perspective that fails to accommodate the agency of the child.

Yet, as Germaine Greer contends, despite the concerns of power differentials between adult artist and child subject, "coming of age is the subject matter of the bildungsroman; most of our art is concerned with it in one way or another. The chief inspiration for any artist is her childhood and youth" (Greer, 2008, p.1). By focusing her look on the child, the maternal photographer addresses the arrangements of power in the maternal relationship through self-reflection and a recollection of her own childhood. Nevertheless, the rise of the motherhood memoir and mommyblogs in the public realm has illuminated the problematics of maternal writing about children in Motherhood studies. As I have previously discussed in chapter two, the power imbalance in the mother/child relationship often sees maternal artists and writers conflicted about whether or not to take their children as subject. The right to privacy and issues of childhood consent introduces difficult ethical considerations for the maternal artist because any discussion of motherhood necessarily involves an examination of the child. Maternal author Anne Lamott (2012) appreciates the tensions that surround the rights of the child in the maternal memoir when she states, "I had to be very protective... So I gave everybody full editorial power." Like Lamott, I acknowledge that issues of childhood consent are complex and subsequently Georgia and Henry were given "full editorial power" in this research to reference the significance of the child as agent.

The child as agent

The depictions of children's bodies as sexual, however, continues to be an overriding concern in childhood photography, yet Kincaid (1992) reminds us the promotion of childhood as devoid of sexuality is equally as problematic as promoting it as sexual. Butler (2008, p. 4) agrees that "in the reduction of the social to the biological, we lose all sense of risk, of agency, all sense of future, of the human project, of the political." Higonnet (1998) is aware of the potential for sexualised images of children to threaten child welfare but remains supportive of representations of childhood that are not merely simplistic or sentimental. Like Kincaid (1998), Kylie Valentine (2008), Mavor (1995), and Marianne Hirsch (1997), Higonnet also calls for a reflective, considered, complex and intelligent questioning of childhood photography that includes the agency of the child. Often the controversy surrounding the portrayal of childhood in photography by politicians, child welfare advocates and the media neglects to engage with the thoughts and perspectives of children themselves. Kevin Rudd's 2008 response in the media to eleven-year-old Olympia Papapetrou's earlier defence of a photograph her mother took of her at six years old is telling of attitudes towards the agency of children. Rudd (2008, p 1) declared:

If people want to make a political point in opposition to me, I don't think it's right they use underage children to make that point,. We have a view about what constitutes a responsible time for people to take decisions for themselves. Children, I don't think fit into that category.

Rudd's comment indicates his refusal to acknowledge Olympia's opinion. She clearly demonstrates her affection for the image when she says "I love the photo so much. It is one of my favourites, if not my favourite photo, my mum has ever taken of me" (Papapetrou, 2008, p. 1). Rudd's response to Olympia's image points to an attachment to the Victorian social idiom "that children should be seen and not heard" (or in this instance that children should be neither seen nor heard) and also flags his own personal difficulties with the photograph. Germaine Greer is critical of Rudd's (2008) reaction to photographs of naked children and states that "the man who rejects them with exaggerated horror is appalled not by the works themselves but by his own response to them" (Greer, 2008, p. 1). Rudd's standpoint specifically attempts to silence Olympia's voice and therefore fails to acknowledge the importance of the child's perspective in the debate around the portrayal of children in childhood photography.

The irony is that children's opinions about the way that childhood is depicted in photography could provide some clarity in a debate the terms of which are set by those who contribute to the oppression of the children they fear. Kylie Valentine (2008, p. 3) agrees that "increased

participation by children by children in public debates about the representation of adolescents, such as Henson's, would produce new knowledge." Children, however, continue to be ignored, despite the potential they may provide for a greater understanding of the nuances involved. Valentine (2008, p. 2) asserts that "the exclusion of children and young people from the ...debate is not really surprising: there is a tradition of treating children as both incapable of contributing to the public arena and in need of protection from its dangers." One of the greatest risks to children has always been the threat of silence. When we refuse children the right to be heard, we limit all power and control, and advocate a hierarchy that truly does threaten the rights and agency of the child. I argue that the debate that stems from controversial images of children almost always fails to advocate acknowledgement of a child's perspective because of its perceived complexity. Increased consideration of children's viewpoints in the debate around representations of childhood is in itself controversial, yet would offer extraordinary potential for liberation and progress.

SBS Insight's *The Naked Eye* (Worthington, 2008) was one public forum which provided the opportunity for children to have their say on the representation of children in photography. The program gathered together children, maternal photographers, art critics, gallery owners, lawyers, child welfare activists and members of the police, amongst others, to discuss the controversy surrounding the portrayal of children in exhibited art photography. *The Naked Eye* examined the multiple and significant concerns pertaining to childhood photography that have been discussed in this chapter. However, the program's most critical contribution to the debate was its attention to the significance of the child's perspective. Despite the controversy that has eventuated from public debate over childhood photography, the majority of children who have collaborated with their mother in photography projects report positive outcomes. During *The Naked Eye* forum, several child subjects who had been photographed by their mothers and others recounted it as a pleasurable and rewarding experience. Zoe Bailey (Worthington, 2008), who was photographed by her mother for an extended period, says:

I think having photographs taken from 16 until now for the last, what, 10 years, I've got a record of that journey from adolescence into womanhood - it's a record of so much more than what perhaps people view in the final image and for me, the memory.

Furthermore, the program revealed that young children felt confident that they were able to give informed consent to being photographed. Most children, when asked on the program, agreed that a child's perspective should be taken into account regarding the ability to give consent. One participant in *The Naked Eye* forum, who was a child subject and was then twenty-five, offered a unique and valuable contribution on the issue of consent. The transcript of the conversation between presenter Jenny Brockie and Marina from (2008, p. 1) attests:

Jenny Brockie: Marina, they're photos of you, the ones that we've just seen. You're 25 now - how do you feel looking at them now?

Marina: I enjoy them just as much as I did when they were first taken.

Jenny Brockie: Did you feel exploited or do you feel exploited looking at them?

Marina: No. At no point was I ever stripped naked. I was already naked. I did not wear clothes at that age. Um, so Sandy taking photographs of me, she would have had to actually clothe me to get the photographs of me clothed.

Jenny Brockie: I know a few kids like that. Do you think you were able to give informed consent about being photographed at that age? How old were you when those photos were taken?

Marina: About 11 or 12, yeah. When the exhibition was planned, Sandy and my mum both came to me and asked me about it and it was a very open discussion. They both told me all the repercussions.... It was important for them for me to know, I can see that now, and therefore I felt at all times safe and supported and able to give my opinion for what it was at that time in my life.

Similarly, thirteen-year-old fellow participant in *The Naked Eye* forum Leela Carroll reinforces Marina's confident belief in the ability of a child to speak in its own interests regarding consent. Leela (2008, p. 1) states:

I think being around that age, like I'm 13 years old, not that I'd be comfortable to like pose nude for an artist, but I think I am of age to be able to like, I know what's right and what's wrong, like I think I know what's right and what's wrong and I think I would be able to like give consent and tell an artist whether I feel comfortable or not.

As a young teenager, Leela clearly articulates her ability to assess risk and project self-assurance. She recognises her own power when she expresses that it would be her choice not to be photographed naked. In a debate that costellates around ideas about the manipulation and powerlessness of children it is contentious to deny a speaking position to the very group who are being spoken for. To conclude this chapter on the controversy surrounding the portrayal of children in art photography, sixteen-year old Zoe Bailey's comments in *The Naked Eye* forum seems fitting:

Yeah, it's a healthy debate ...as long as the subjects themselves are comfortable with their images being projected into society and as long as everybody is aware there is a process between the artist and the subject.

Process: Protocols, Classification and ramifications.

Following the Henson controversy in January 2009 The Australia Council introduced Protocols for working with children in art as a means of guiding the process between artist and child subject. The Protocols set forth that any artworks produced by an artist, which involve a child under the age of 15, must adhere to certain procedures if the creation of the artwork is funded or partly funded by the Australia Council. The protocols can be accessed in full at http://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/about_us/strategies_2/children_in_art. Broadly, the protocols require that artists obtain parental consent and adherence to state or territory laws in the state in which the artworks are created. The Protocols, however, only strictly apply to works or organizations exhibiting the works, which receive Australia Council funding and adherence to protocols may not guarantee exemption from Classification.

Because of a lack of consistency between state and territory laws and the uncertainty about what constitutes an offensive or "submittable" publication, it is difficult for the artist to ascertain if a particular artwork requires classification. Most artists, according to Arts Law Centre of Australia (2011, p. 7), "do not submit their works for classification, usually because they do not consider them to be a 'submittable' publication but also because of the costs involved. This carries a certain amount of risk for the artist." The risk for the artist is that they may be publicly villified for works that are ultimately not classified as offensive to contemporary standards.

This was the case for Bill Henson, whose works of a partially naked adolescent girl were granted a PG rating after submission for classification. Indeed, both the Arts Law Centre of Australia and NAVA have asked the Committee to exempt art works exhibited in a gallery from classification. In a statement to the Committee in April 2011 Tamara Winikoff, Executive Director of National Association for the Visual Arts (NAVA) Ltd, states that "it would be excessive to require all artworks to be assessed by the Classification board when only a small proportion are contentious; classification would come at a considerable cost, both financial and in time, to artists" (cited in Senate Hansard, 2011, p.15). There is little doubt that the majority of artists and in particular maternal photographers who often struggle to find the time and money to produce complex visions of childhood can afford to submit their images for Classification.

There is little doubt that the costs associated with submission for Classification are prohibitive and create a predicament for artists, galleries and publishers who endeavour to incorporate sensitive

content that may confront or challenge conventional beliefs. Tamara Winikoff (cited in, Senate Hansard, 2011, p.15) maintains that “we are already seeing the results of a campaign being waged by child protection zealots that images of children, unclothed or clothed, are disappearing from the public domain.” In testament to Winikoff’s concerns, my own photographs of mothers and children were not published in a feature article written by psychiatrist Dr Dawn Barker, titled: ‘M/other love: the first relationship & the photography of Toni Wilkinson’, in *Artlink* 29, (3),2009. Despite having parental approval for each of the images *Artlink* declined to publish the images because they were unwilling to risk publication without classification since the considerable fallout from the Henson controversy. Moreover, *Artlink* were unable to submit the images for classification due to time and cost restraints. *Artlink*’s (2009) website said of the photographs from the m/others series:

Toni Wilkinson's 'm/other' exhibition of photographs at Perth Galleries, North Fremantle earlier this year confronted the viewer with a series of atypical representations of the mother child relationship. She gives a glimpse into the privacy, and reality, of a mother's world by showing us mothers and their children at their most naked, physically and emotionally.

The unwillingness of *Artlink* to publish the m/others photographs is one example of the negative consequences for maternal photographers caused by the moral panic that erupted from the Henson debate in 2008. Certainly, then, images that provide alternative representations of maternity and childhood, other than those conventionally depicted in the social realm, are at risk of vanishing. Conservative responses to portrayals of the maternal relationship and depictions of the child that interrogate the banality of the familiar, threaten to shut down any questioning of the fragility of subjectivity and human relationships. Some photographers, such as Connie Petrillo, have already limited their practice because of the trauma associated with criminal charges laid as a direct result of moral panic. Petrillo (personal communication, June 9, 2011) says:

this event has, and still is, continually stifling [sic] my creativity and has made me very wary of possible misinterpretations of my artworks by other people. The concern here is that artists constantly have to defend themselves against accusations and misinterpretations that were never intended in the creativity of the work. This misinterpretation of the artist's intention can lead to serious repercussions.

This self-censorship that Petrillo identifies as resulting from a moral panic about photographs which interrogate subjectivity risks significantly reducing the capacity of Australian society to facilitate change, or challenge restrictive stereotypes which persist in the Western tradition. According to Millner, (2010, p. 1) “photographic representations of the child have explored significant political and social themes, aesthetic issues, individual identity, indeed the broad question of what it means to be human.” Nonetheless, maternal photographers have long since contributed to the canon of photographic images of the mother/child bond to provide new opportunities for subjectivity and to

resist the paternal package of the symbolic order. In a climate of fear about the potential ramifications of resisting the restrictive processes involved in publishing and exhibiting images of children, many maternal photographers continue to deliver complex visions of the maternal bond through surrender to uncertainty, despite the challenge that struggling against controversy and moral panic demands.

Chapter Five

Uncertain Surrenders

“Exchange, then, is real not formal, and because it has to do with reality between two human beings, it passes on a truth that somehow is shareable by others” (Irigaray, 2004, p. xii).

Throughout this chapter I explicate the ways I combine theory and practice in my photography and photo book. As part of a family album, the photographs in *Uncertain surrenders* are taken at home in Perth Western Australia and on holiday overseas. Rose (2010, p. 131) asserts that “family photographs, even if they never picture a women’s domestic labour, are central to the emotional and material work women do to make families happen.” I will argue that the images of my children produced for this research are more than reflections on childhood. Instead, they are passionate renderings of the maternal relationship, developed over time through the intricate process of photography. Each photograph represents an exchange that facilitates mutual recognition between my children and myself: they are uncertain surrenders. Hirsch (1997, p. 165) maintains, “mothers are always exposed by and through their children. Mothers’ stories and children’s stories are always intertwined: only theory can try to keep them comfortably separate.” Thus, these images reveal what I see when I look at my children. They emphasise the complex range of emotions and fears that possess my unconscious maternal looking.

The portraits of Georgia and Henry indicate the mutuality of the maternal gaze and the reciprocal process of looking between mother and child. The exchange of the gaze between myself and my children in *Uncertain surrenders* is foregrounded. Derrida (2010, p. 32) states:

To give a photograph can be a deeply serious gesture: I give as if I were giving myself, as if I were giving even my impossible narcissism— eyes that cannot see themselves, that see and that see that they cannot see themselves. This is like the erotics of the gaze, the exchange of gazes, gazes that cross at the point where each one cannot reappropriate itself, and therefore already gives itself, delivers itself and gives itself up, unarmed: this is a gesture that can in certain situations be more exposed, more giving and more intense than “making love”.

As such the ‘unarmed’ exchange of gazes that occur between us in the portraits are intimate mutual surrenders. Michael Wetzell (2010,p.33) asserts that the “metaphor of photography as a trace of itself, not like the trace of a signature, like writing, but like a trace as the imprint of the body itself, as a small piece, it is also something like a gift of love.” These portraits, then, which are mutual ‘gifts of love’ offered through reciprocity of the gaze are metaphors of the intensity of the maternal bond.

According to Walter Benjamin (cited in Wells, 2003, p. 13) “photography, with its devices of slow motion and enlargement, reveals the secret. It is through photography that we first discover the existence of this optical unconscious, just as we discover the instinctual unconscious through psychoanalysis.” The exposures I make of my children therefore are multiple exposures, which provide the opportunity for complicated, paradoxical readings of the maternal relationship and elevate the significance of maternal passion. Moreover, my images reinvigorate the *chora* to deliver ‘new beginnings’ via the representation of the passionate complexities of the maternal which continue to be seen as a threat and are subsequently suppressed in contemporary western society. Throughout this chapter I will also examine the particular photographic codes and conventions that I use to produce photographs that engage with the conflicting dynamics that inhabit the maternal realm. Furthermore, I describe my ‘*photographie féminine*’ and ‘heretical’ approach which is developed according to a maternal, rather than paternal, masculine, economy to better acknowledge and accommodate the other.

Maternal passion and photography: uneasy together

In this research, photography serves as a powerful, albeit problematic, vehicle to express the potency of maternal passion. Significantly, it is a shared capacity for the ambiguous, for love, death and madness to facilitate *jouissance*, which aligns photography and maternal passion so bitter-sweetly. In particular, it is the coexistence of beauty and menace in both maternal passion and the photograph that is crucial to this research. Nevertheless, I am mindful that, according to Susan Sontag (1977, p. 8), “photography is not practiced by most people as an art. It is mainly a social rite, a defense against anxiety, and a tool of power.” Indeed, it is the camera’s resemblance to a gun, its sharp relationship to death, that marks it as a weapon to be feared for its potential to wound. Barthes (2000, p. 14) believes that “the photographer must exert himself to the utmost to keep the photograph becoming death.” However, while there is little doubt that the power dynamic swings towards the photographer in the photographic process, the camera cannot murder. Nevertheless, photography may be considered a predatory act and Sontag (1977, p. 14) states that “to photograph people is to violate them, by seeing them as they never see themselves, by having knowledge of them they can never have; it turns people into objects that can be symbolically possessed.” As a maternal photographer I am aware of the potential for the photographic process to have negative consequences for my children. Therefore, I remain actively vigilant and conscious of my children’s potential vulnerability in this project and have maintained consistent open discussions with them about their contribution to the research.

Despite photography’s ability to ‘wound’ and its intimate connection with death, it is also photography’s correlation with love that renders it as a particularly acute means of delivering

maternal passion. Barthes (2000, p. 73) said "I must interrogate the evidence of Photography, not from the viewpoint of pleasure, but in relation to what we romantically call love and death." With this statement and certainly throughout his seminal text on photography, *Camera Lucida*, Barthes declares that the real power of the photograph is its potential to touch us with its unique facility to relay the affiliation between love and death. Like photography, maternal passion alludes to the dialectic between love and death. According to Lisa Baraitser (2010, p. 5), "it is a mother's capacity to sublimate, to transform attachment and aggression into love and detachment that is the core of maternal passion." The combination of love and loss in both maternal passion and photography is a consistent component of my practice.

With every trip of the shutter on my camera when I photograph my children I am severely reminded that I have lost something that will never come again. Lynn Powell, in *Framing innocence*, says of maternal photographer Cynthia Stewart's experience of photographing her children "that overwhelming sense of the transience of life made her marvel at her camera... a contraption that could catch and keep what was fleeting.... Every picture she tookwas a moment she had snatched away from death." Like Stewart, I utilise photography to alleviate the melancholy that overwhelmingly accompanies my surrender to the terror of the continual movement of my children away from me, to drive out the fear of loss that accompanies death, and to bring my children to life again in a different way through the photograph, as a trace of my love for them.

Hirsch (1997, p. 155) attests "mothers may frequently take their children's pictures" and photographs of children by their mothers are considered normal practice in family life. However, the mother as artist photographing her children for purposes other than the family album alone can stimulate nervous readings and questions of power that I have previously discussed. I acknowledge that my photographs have a twin purpose, as documents for public exhibition which represent 'maternal passion' and also as lasting family memories. Hirsch (1997) believes that the mother/photographer who uses photography to scrutinise the familial gaze may facilitate deep connections with her children through such images. On such photographs mother and child may "look at it together and laugh, especially if their relationship can accommodate conflict, reparation and recognition? a possible meeting ground" (Hirsch, 1997, p. 170). I have photographed Georgia and Henry since birth and, specifically for this research, from the ages of thirteen and five respectively. Like other children of maternal photographers, for example Jessie Mann, whom I have previously quoted, both articulate an active engagement with the process.

Feminist theorist Jane Gallop's discussion of the coexistence of art photography and family life in *Living with his camera* (2003) is an insightful first person account of what it feels like to be the photographed subject in the private realm. Gallop's husband, Dick Blau, takes art photographs of

his family for public exhibition, which depict visions of family life not commonly seen in the family album. In some photographs taken by Blau, Gallop (2003, p. 175) states, "I find the sort of alienated individual experience usually banished from the family album in the face of the child." Gallop recognises that Blau's images of his family reflect on the realities of family life in a way that many family albums do not. Nevertheless, Gallop's experience as photographed subject indicates an acceptance of her involvement when she states of one image depicting herself and her son that "the two figures in the coexist comfortably not only with each other but also with the camera." As photographed subjects Georgia and Henry have similarly expressed comfort with their involvement in the photographic process.

I always ask my children's permission before I photograph them and also encourage them to contribute ideas on locations, props and pose. Regarding her children's involvement in her photography maternal photographer Sally Mann (cited in Hirsch, 1997, p. 162) states that "at times, it is difficult to say exactly who makes the pictures. Some are gifts to me from my children." Similarly, I perceive my children, Georgia and Henry, as willing contributors and active participants in these photographs. Both children have expressed their willingness to be involved in the research throughout our discussions. When I asked Georgia and Henry to write down their feelings about the project their responses were sophisticated and indicate an engagement with the collaborative process. Georgia (2011) says:

I find my Mum's photographs very interesting and love reading what she has to write about the photographs she takes of us. It is quite a privilege and honour to be so much a part of Mum's research. The work is an act of love. I have no objections to the images being exhibited. Mainly because [she makes] a point of asking whether I am comfortable with the image [she has] taken. This allows me to have a large say in the process.

Significantly, Georgia's response clearly articulates her considerable control in the process of this research. Similarly, Henry (2011) communicates a level of refinement and insouciance about his participation when he states "most of the time I like getting my photo taken because I'm helping her out and because I like hanging out with her... I am used to being photographed and because it is natural." Henry's use of the term 'natural' illustrates his relatively carefree attitude to being photographed, which has developed from an early engagement with the act of photography. Both Georgia and Henry acknowledge their active involvement in all aspects of the process and are confident in their ability to refuse to participate at any stage. Nevertheless, thus far Georgia and Henry have indicated enthusiasm about the intimacy that has developed between us, and an ongoing commitment to this unique shared experience.

Madness is another shared and complex quality which further connects photography and maternal passion. Kristeva (2005, p. 6) describes maternal passion as a “passion pregnant with madness and sublimity.” Kristeva (2005) believes that the risk of madness which is always present in a conflicted, desirous maternal passion provides opportunities for culture. Representations of maternal passion allow a ‘working-through of maternal madness” and that through recognition and remembrance in such depictions we can better find a psychic balance. In the final page of *Camera Lucida* Barthes (2000, p. 119) declares that the most powerful photographs, like maternal passion, are possessed by a madness that is born of conflicts and desires. However, that society is fearful of this potent madness in photography is clear to Barthes (2000, p. 117) who states that “society is concerned to tame the photograph, to temper the madness which keeps threatening to explode in the face of whoever looks at it.” I argue that photographs which remain difficult to come to because they represent the instability that is born of madness, are doubly threatening to society when they also reveal the passions of the maternal.

Representations of maternal passion also provide unique opportunities for the exploration of subjectivity. Images which depict maternal passion are significant because as Kristeva (2005, p. 6) reminds us, “maternal passion is a cleft between the mother’s hold over the child and sublimation. This division makes the risk of madness ever present, and yet this very risk offers a perpetual chance for culture.” The photographs in this research are inflected with madness; they represent my conflicted desires to hold on to my children and to simultaneously surrender to their release. As such, the images produced are never free from the risk of uncertain readings because they refuse to balk at the combination of the beauty and menace that constitutes maternal passion and potent photography. The photographs in this research, then, create a discussion on the potential of the (mad) photograph as a vehicle to express the madness of maternal passion in a way that may serve a socially or culturally effective purpose.

Photography like maternal passion, is also distinctly ambiguous and this similarity makes the camera a unique implement to represent the significance of maternal passion. According to John Berger (1990, p. 91,) “all photographs are ambiguous. All photographs have been taken out of a continuity.... Discontinuity always produces ambiguity.” Furthermore, photographs are located outside of real events, isolated moments in a flow of time that can never be repeated. Webster (1980) agrees that photography is ambiguous because of “the photographic paradox”, which is the seemingly unmediated nature of the photograph as an independent reflection of reality whilst at the same time being a construction. Photography then, is ambiguous because it can never offer certainty; it lacks continuity and relies on “the need for translation alongside translation’s redundancy” (Webster 1980, p. 157). The photographic image is always humanly conceived and therefore imprinted with a particular point of view; despite its attachment to a referent, the

photograph can only ever offer “verisimilitude”. Like photography, maternal passion is ambiguous and involves contradictions, which create tension that is difficult to acknowledge. Within maternal passion both negative and positive feelings coexist and more significantly there is also a detachment or “depassioning” (Kristeva 2005, p. 3) that allows for separation and yet paradoxically strengthens maternal love. According to Baraitser (2010, p. 5):

Kristeva seems to put her finger on something about the maternal that remains troubling...it is really the mother’s willingness and capacity to let go of the child that constitutes the core of maternal passion that we don’t want to think about, because we are so invested in the belief that she of all people, will never let us go.

It is the unsettling of maternal passion described by Baraitser that may contribute to the public anxiety which surrounds photographs of children by maternal photographers discussed in a previous chapter. Complex images of the maternal relationship like those, for example, of Caruuci and Maybin may be seen as confronting in their depiction of separation and loss. Indeed, the conflicting dynamics of maternal ambivalence has always been a difficult concept to grasp in western culture as I have discussed earlier. However, I am aware of my own ‘depassioning’ when I photograph my children. As Kafka (cited in Barthes, 2000, p. 53) says “we photograph things in order to drive them out of our minds.” When I photograph my children I am “depassioning”, attempting to set them free by detaching myself through the ambiguous photographic process. Each frame I take, then, represents my maternal ‘depassioning, a letting go of my children, and yet simultaneously also remains an attempt to hold on to them through the creation of a new possibility that photography allows. Caroline Rooney (2007, p. 94) believes that photography “could be said to be a mini-enlightenment: the other arrives to touch me and I feel not their absence but their presence.” Hence I use photography as a creative tool to create ambiguity in the photographs and also acknowledge the inevitable release of my children alongside my maternal desire to call them back to me.

Whilst I use photography as a vehicle to convey the scope of my own maternal passion I accept that taking my children as subjects in this research may be perceived as problematic. In particular, I may be seen to be producing images that attempt to promote a dominant adult perspective, which defines childhood. According to Patricia Holland in *Picturing childhood: The myth of the child in popular imagery* (2004, p. xiii), “we must always remember that while individual pictures may portray real children- each child unique and individual the imagery shows us an abstract, shifting and heavily ideological concept.” Hirsch (1999, p. xvi) agrees that “the photograph is the site at which numerous gazes intersect...an infinitely multiple and contradictory series of looks; and the external institutional and ideological gazes in relation to which the act of taking pictures defines itself.” Consequently, these photographs of my children, like many images by maternal

photographers, do not promise simple readings or sentimentality. Instead they are complex images produced with an awareness of the complicated dialogue that surrounds the portrayal of children within the history of photography by maternal photographers in western culture. On Sally Mann's photography of her children Higonnet (1999, p. 339) states "it is not merely a photographic document, but a complex image that works self-consciously with the history of photography." Because I am significantly influenced by other feminist and maternal photographers I too create a discourse on the connection between maternal longing and photography, rather than a simple exposé of childhood as innocent and precious. Regarding images of children, Holland (2204, p. 205) states, "all too frequently the available imagery avoids such radical instability." I combine photography with maternal passion to create uneasy images that represent the complex maternal relationship with my children and reference the instability of subjectivity. The photographs exemplify the uncertain surrenders that occur between my children and I as together we involve each other in the mutual process of give and take that photography and maternal passion jointly enable.

New beginnings: Recreating the *chora* with photography

Kristeva (2005, p. 4) says, "the temporality of maternal passion can be viewed analytically as a kind of *detachment in relation to the sole object*, as an invitation to the plurality of beings and creations; it can be seen as the source of 'depassioning' and freedom." The temporality of maternal passion is characterised as "duration by means of new beginnings" (Kristeva, 2005, p. 4). Moreover, Kristeva sees the maternal experience of time an opportunity for new beginnings, which is established with the involvement of the maternal body in the birth process. For the mother, giving birth signals a death through separation from the child, but also more strongly marks a new beginning because of the importance of her body in the process. It is the maternal capacity for the freedom that accompanies new beginnings that is significant for Kristeva who says (2005, p. 4) that "being free means having the courage to begin anew, such is the philosophy of motherhood." It is this letting go of passion which constitutes maternal passion that I involve in my photography to create new beginnings. Kristeva (2005, p. 6) also maintains that "only if depassioning is at work in maternal passion can sublimation move from body to *thought* thus encouraging the child's development of thought." When I photograph my children I consider the freedom that their separation from me allows for them to develop as thoughtful, functioning individuals. Furthermore, I share my maternal passion and 'depassioning' with them through the complex process of photography and embrace the potential for mutual development and 'new beginnings' through shared experiences in this research.

Like maternal passion, photography also has the capacity to create 'new beginnings' with its unique ability to redefine the relationship between time and space through the certainty of what Barthes

(2000, p. 66) named 'having been there'. In *Camera Lucida* Barthes, in mourning discusses how he uses photography to search for the 'essence' of his dead mother. According to Barthes (2000, p. 66) "photography thereby compelled me to perform a painful labor." Throughout the book Barthes draws consistent correlations between time, photography and the maternal. Barthes (2000, p. 82) says "the photograph *astonishes* me, with an astonishment which endures and renews itself inexhaustibly...Photography has something to do with resurrection'." Hence Barthes recognises photography's potential to create new beginnings with its ability to traverse time. According to Geoffrey Batchen (2009, p. 7), Barthes "does so on the basis of photography's introduction of a "new space-time category: spatial immediacy and temporal anteriority"—an experience that he sums up as 'having-been-there'." The significance of the connection made by Barthes between photography and the maternal is reinforced when Barthes likens the connection between the photograph and the referent to the umbilical cord. Mavor (2007, p. 144) believes, that "Barthes' photographic discourse becomes the maternal body: a place that was already there, a place where he was sure he had once been, a place he could never fully leave... the maternal body as *the* place." Barthes, then recalls the maternal body into photographic discourse with his description of photography's "new space—time' category and in doing so reawakens the *chora*. Like Barthes, I too utilise photographic discourse throughout my research to create new beginnings, and to restore the *chora* through the works.

This concomitance of photography and the maternal in a "new space—time" category that becomes place, spoken of by Barthes, recalls Kristeva's *chora* and is therefore particularly significant for this research. As I have discussed in an earlier chapter, Kristeva's notion of the *chora*, which she introduces in *Revolution in Poetic language* (1974) evokes a pre-lingual, maternal spatial realm shared by mother and child. Kristeva develops her theory of the *chora* drawing from Plato's term in *Timaeus* where the *chora* is described as "mother" and "the receptacle and in a manner the nurse, of all generation" (Plato cited in Jowett, 2009, p. 30). Indeed Plato's *chora*, according to Geoffrey Bennington (1993,p.209) can "appear to contest the father on the basis of the mother." Consequently, feminist theorists, such as Kristeva and Irigaray, have consistently drawn on the *chora* in their work. Plato's notion of the *chora* as a space/ place that was instrumental in the creation of the universe has been discussed by many other theorists including Derrida, Grosz, and Butler. Significantly, however, it is Kristeva's notion of the *chora*, which specifically informs my research. According to Taylor and Winquist (2003, pp. 118-119):

Kristeva establishes her concept of the *chora* as the designated space of the maternal, that is, the repressed, unconscious element of the cultural symbolic or Law of the Father. As a referent for the chaotic, libidinal drives of the pre-oedipal child, the *chora* articulates the debt of patriarchal discourse to the mother.

I reclaim Kristeva's concept of the *chora* throughout this research to foreground the maternal body and to reinscribe the significance of the ambiguous maternal in the formation of the subject, which significantly continues to be overlooked in contemporary culture. According to Margaroni (2005, p. 78) the *chora* "enables Kristeva to conceptualize this intersection both spatially (as the in-between produced by the ambiguous relatedness of two already socialized bodies: that is, the body of the not-yet – subject and that of its [m]other.)" As discussed in a previous chapter, Kristeva (1984) conceptualizes the *chora* as "articulations", "rhythms" that are pre-symbolic, maternal and constitute the "in-between" space/place that envelops mother and child. Moreover, Kristeva (1984, p. 25) maintains that forces, social as well as the corporeal, influence the ambiguous space of the *chora*. As such the body of the child is socialised because of the shared in-between experience with the mother. Kristeva's semiotic *chora* announces a "beginning" that precedes the "the Beginning" of language. Subsequently, the concept of Kristeva's *chora* works to "displace the speaking subject, (re)tracing its emergence not only before logos but also, in returning it to the maternal body, beyond the Phallus as the structuring principle of the symbolic order" (Margaroni, 2005, p. 79). My portraits become the *chora* – an ambiguous shared in-between place between and in-between my children and myself. Together we create 'new beginnings' as we disrupt the structuring principle of the Phallic and instead immerse ourselves in the *chora* to surrender to a maternal return. Significantly also, the title of the series *Uncertain Surrenders* is homage to Kristeva's ambiguous *chora* as a force of unfolding between and 'in-between' mother and child.

A remembrance of the maternal and a restoration of the *chora* is further exemplified through this research because all of the images were taken on a camera that was a gift from my mother. I use a large format Pentax6x7 camera to photograph my own children as a "(re)trace" to my own mother as well as to my children to reclaim a maternal legacy. This maternally gifted camera becomes a device to bring the 'chaos' of the maternal body into representation. The structuring maternal semiotic *chora* reveals that the maternal body operates between nature and culture, and as such it is always a body in crisis. Subsequently the reinscription of the maternal body encourages interrogation of subject formation. According to Kristeva (1984, p. 25) subjective development is "always arranged according to the various constraints imposed on this body always already involved in a semiotic process by family and social structures." Therefore the camera in this research, is used as a maternal inheritance, functions to bring back the maternal body into culture and to "expose the cultural taboos of the maternal subject" (Nixon, 2005, p. 12). Margaroni (2005, p. 96) states that "the maternal body is neither an alias or an alibi for the other but a socially experienced situation of alterity that compels us to rethink our relation to the other (and other)." Through my own desiring maternal body and the *chora* I reclaim female experience for my children as their 'first other.' To create a real exchange between us leads to a questioning and remembering —so that their own future personal discoveries may lead to 'new beginnings'.

Furthermore these photographs of Georgia and Henry initiate maternal dialogue between us. According to Irigaray (2004, p. xii):

A dialogue always ought to take place between two people ... who question themselves in order to guide one another on the path towards coming closer in respect for their differences and transcendences. Who also question how they could create a shareable world: a truth, an art an ethics and a politics, which transcend each one but which they could both share.

The process of this research has facilitated a questioning and closeness between my children and myself despite our differences. Hence, photography has become a dialogue, has created our own mutual realm. Irigaray (2004, p. xi) also states, "the best dialogues happens when love exists between the two persons and towards the subject which is at stake between them." In conversation about this research Georgia (2011) identified my desire to photograph my children as "a search" and "a need to understand your complex maternal identity" and importantly ".... that the photographs are a way to openly show your love". These discussions about our involvement in this research are examples of the ways that photography has created a 'shareable world', closeness, questioning and opportunities for connectedness of mother and child.

Herethics and *Photographie féminine*

It is important to acknowledge that this research could be seen to conform to an approach that is possibly problematic in its ethical imperatives. Nevertheless, I believe that in order to develop a debate about maternity, which remains a threat to society and is therefore denied a voice, it is critical to discuss the relevance and complexities of maternal passion from a maternal perspective, despite the possibility of any perception of being an ethically compromised position. As I have noted in the introduction, while I believe this project to be a collaborative endeavour, I also accept that it is my consistent presence and engagement with photography and the photographic portrait that has shaped the research. In the photographic portrait according to Susan Bright (2005, p.19) "motivations are never really clear and reactions to a portrait can vary enormously. To one it can be exploitative, engaging or ethically uncertain, and to another tender, informed and noble." It is my passionate maternal approach in these photographic portraits of Georgia and Henry that ensures my accountability, love and respect for my children in their engagement with this project.

Throughout this research I have employed an ethical practice which seeks to include female subjectivity and an intimate connection to the other through photography as a number of other feminist photographers and researchers have done before me. In her 2003 thesis titled *Un Voyage vers une photographie féminine: the gender politics of body and space* and in other work (2002,

2009, 2011), Allmark articulates a *photographie féminine* approach that incorporates theory in practice and is influenced by French feminist theory that calls for women to reinscribe the female body in their photographic practice. As such, *photographie féminine* prioritises and reinscribes the womanly body by utilising photography as a subversive mechanism. *Photographie féminine*, according to Allmark (2002, p. 3), is “an awareness of, the feminised body in which I try to disrupt the masculine structure of representation by attempting to introduce new formulations or discourses.” I draw from Allmark’s approach because it is one that is primarily influenced by the significance of the maternal, female body in visual culture and because, as Irigaray (2004, p. 11), states “woman ought to be able to find herself, among other things, through the images of herself already deposited in history and the conditions of production of the work of man, and not on the basis of his work, his genealogy.” Therefore I acknowledge and embrace *photographie féminine* as a feminist method that significantly influences my research.

Allmark also declares the importance of the *chora* to the development of ‘*photographie féminine*’. Allmark (2003, p. 174) states “my interest in the *chora* is its association with an intermediate feminine space which is both metaphysical and bodily, and in which representation is heterogeneous and disruptive.” Consequently it is also this emphasis on the relevance of the *chora* in Allmark’s work that subsequently renders *photographie féminine* as meaningful and helpful to my approach in this research. Like Allmark, many other feminist photographers including Mary Kelly, Pat Brassington, Denise Ferris and Jo Spence, have advocated an approach that merges women’s lived experiences and photography. In particular, Allmark’s *photographie féminine* emphasises female subjectivity, which continues to be significantly underrepresented in the Western cultural economy. According to Allmark (2003, p. 40), “my work follows an *écriture féminine* or, more descriptively, it is a *photographie féminine* that I engage in. I try to express what would be otherwise repressed by (masculine) culture. I am communicating and foregrounding my position as a woman.” The maternal subjective position remains largely invisible in visual culture. In *Enemies of good art* (2010), a series of radio talks, feminist author and academic Dr Amber Jacobs and maternal photographer Eti Wade discuss Luce Irigaray’s idea that there is a “Ontological dereliction” where the maternal has no space in culture or theory. In order to redress this “dereliction” of the maternal subject, like Allmark, I bring my own subject position as a woman, and specifically my experience of motherhood, to articulate a maternal point of view through my photography in this research. Allmark (2003, p. 105) references the incorporation of the photographer in a photograph when she states, “to make a photograph also reveals the trace and the mortality, the vulnerability and the mutability of the photographer.” Overwhelmingly throughout these photographs of my children, it is my maternal subjectivity that is foregrounded.

Photographie féminine also utilises contradiction as an emancipatory tool for subjectivity and resistance to the Law of the Father. According to Allmark (2003, p. 8) *photographie féminine* “acknowledges desire, contradiction and involves self-reflexivity which resembles the variable contexts of my experience.” The incorporation of contradiction in *Uncertain surrenders* also works to destabilise conventional ideas of fixed subjectivity and also to highlight my own experience of maternal ambivalence. As noted in a previous chapter, where I discussed Rosika Parker’s ideas on maternal ambivalence, I embrace and represent the coexistence of conflicting feelings of love and hate in the production of my photographs. I use lighting, location, pose and gesture to create ambiguity in the images so that they operate on a more complicated level than conventional imagery of the maternal relationship in contemporary culture. In an essay titled ‘Blessed and Bound’ that discussed early images from *Uncertain surrenders* that were included in an 2009 solo exhibition of my work, author Susan Bright (2009, p. 5) states:

Wilkinson doesn’t shy away from things which are not talked about, she makes them her subject matter and deals with the consequences. The range of human emotion from sexuality, loneliness, alienation, manipulation and the rawness of love are all palpable Wilkinson’s desire to tackle subject matter so often sentimentalized with a rigor and unflinching honesty is refreshing. She refuses to dance around subjects that might make the viewer uncomfortable.

Indeed, as Bright so readily identifies, it is my desire to acknowledge the complexities of maternity and subjectivity that drives me to create photographs which refuse to engender easy readings. I deliberately work against simple, stable opportunities for the maternal in these photographs when I incorporate contradictions with elements that jar and therefore encourage the reader to question. I photograph my children in ways that may seem confronting to many. Indeed, I actively introduce tension when I photograph from unusual angles, at awkward moments and sometimes in difficult locations. I do this in line with a *photographie féminine*, which Allmark (2003, p. 13) states, “involves destabilising binary oppositions.” Subsequently, I too blur boundaries with my photography “by uniting divergent dichotomies in my photographic framing” (Allmark, 2003, p. 13). One method I utilize to ‘unite divergent dichotomies’ in my work is to set up or stage a particular scene and then allow an intuitive moment to create tension or struggle within the image. For example, an image of Georgia wearing earphones and a t-shirt emblazoned with horses running wild, which suggests teenage ennui and rebellion, is countered by an upward gaze and nervous nail-biting. Consequently, here the maternal relationship is revealed as an ambivalent one because I depict my children as possessing the capacity for complex emotions that fuse innocence with knowingness, confidence and vulnerability, tenderness and violence, pleasure and pain.

The fusion of competing and contradictory elements within the photographs also facilitates the opportunity for *jouissance*, which I have discussed specifically in relation to other prominent

maternal photographers in an earlier chapter. Linked to the perverse and the abject, which I will discuss further in relation to my work imminently, *jouissance* is critical for my approach, which, like *photographie féminine*, has potential as a subversive mechanism. Allmark (2003) maintains *jouissance* allows a “resistance to the symbolic” because it enables a reworking of the myths of femininity. Allmark (2003, p. 11) states “to bring out the excluded, abject status of the feminine into representation...is about *jouissance*... dissolving subject/object dichotomy... evoking the creative possibilities associated with the multiple sexuality of women in contrast to the singular, linear, phallic libidinal economy of men.” Throughout *Uncertain Surrenders* I refine maternal passion to bring back the raptures of *jouissance* that are ordinarily denied in the majority of conventional, clean, pretty and pastel images of the maternal that pervade western culture.

Throughout *Uncertain surrenders* I struggle against perpetuating traditional maternal qualities and codes of patriarchal motherhood that limit opportunities for subjectivity in both mother and child. Allmark (2003, p. 122) states, “*photographie féminine* is infused with the desire to play with, or move, beyond patriarchal stereotypes. It should involve the feminist visual shocks of irony, parody, anger, satire, humour and mimicry.” I also incorporate these “feminist visual shocks” in my photographic approach as a subversive device to disrupt conventional, restrictive maternal qualities. As noted in a previous chapter, Liss (2009, p. xv11) is emphatic when she asserts that representations of feminist motherhood should mock acceptable caring maternal qualities of the maternal. In *Uncertain surrenders* I photograph my children in ways that could be seen as inappropriate for a mother to depict her child. I choose circumstances that are charged with emotion such as an image of Henry taken shortly after a hospital visit where his broken arm has been wrapped in a sling and his face displays some of the pain of the injury. The purposeful upward perspective I chose in this particular image taken from a low angle works to magnify Henry’s apparent grief. London, Upton, Stone, Kobre and Brill (2005, p. 360) state, “Photographing ... by looking up at it can give it an imposing air as it looms above the viewer.” Hence the low camera angle introduces an element of menace into the image and disrupts any easy opportunity for the representation of a benign maternal relationship. Furthermore, Henry’s heightened sorrow portrays the magnitude of my maternal fear for his wellbeing. It is therefore a mutual and uncertain surrender between mother and child that is revealed in the image, one that moves outside of the traditional bounds usually operating in visual culture.

As I have explained earlier in this section, photographs have the capacity to ‘shock’ and also to facilitate a unique connection with another. Barthes (2000, p. 82) observes, ‘what the Photograph feeds my mind on...by a brief action whose shock cannot drift into reverie... is the simple mystery of concomitance.’ The relationship between photography and a connection to the other is

particularly exemplified using a *photographie féminine* approach. According to Allmark (2003, p. 189):

Unlike mainstream photography, *photographie féminine* is derived from a feminine libidinal economy as described by Cixous which is open to difference. It is a willingness to be traversed by the other and it is a deconstructive space of pleasure and orgasmic interchange with the other. The feminist treatment of the camera is as a utensil, a magnet to unite the photographer and subject in producing an image that represents their encounter. It involves a communion of souls rather than a division of spirits between photographer and subject (which is the masculine approach).

It is this feminine accommodation of the other in *photographie féminine* that makes it a fitting schema for my own research. Unlike earlier discussions of photography as a predatory act, Allmark suggests that a feminist photographic “approach might be a way of breathing life into the subject” (2003, p190). By focusing on the intimacy that exists between my children and myself I am revitalising the maternal bond via the photographic process. *Photographie féminine*’s involvement of “a communion of souls rather than a division of spirits between photographer and subject”(Allmark 2003, p. 121) links it to Kristeva’s maternal ‘herethics’, which is also pivotal for this research. In *Tales of Love, Stabat Mater* (1983) Kristeva articulates a ‘herethics’ based on her own experience of motherhood and the resulting blurring of the self and other that occurs in pregnancy and the suffering of childbirth. Kristeva (1983, p. 262) says, “for a mother... the arbitrariness that is the other (the child) goes without saying. For her the impossible is like this: it becomes one with the implacable. The other is inevitable... for this other still comes from me.” The unique maternal bodily connection that spirals between mother and child in pregnancy marks a new opportunity for an ethical relationship between m/other.

According to Oliver (1993, p. 5), “Kristeva uses maternity as a model for an outlaw ethics, what she calls ‘herethics’. Herethics is founded on the ambiguity in pregnancy and birth between subject and object positions.” As such it is an ethics that operates outside of the Symbolic law of the father and recognises the potential for satisfaction when one can embrace the other as oneself through identification with the mother:

It is an ethics, which challenges rather than presupposes an autonomous ethical agent. Herethics sets up one’s obligations to the other as obligations to the self and obligations to the species. This ethics binds the subject to the other through love and not the law. (Oliver, 1993, p. 5)

Oliver describes outlaw ethics as an ethics which is reconceived through the recovery and articulation of the maternal function. She states (1993, p. 189), “Kristeva’s is an outlaw ethics. Ethics is not a matter of enforcing the Law. Rather, it is a matter of embracing the return of the

repressed other, the foreigner, the outcast, the woman, the Unconscious, *jouissance* in its manifestations.” To lift the other up and out through various means into discourse is a recognition of the other within and articulates Kristeva’s notions of “subjects in process” and herethics. Furthermore, Marilyn Edelstein (cited in Crownfield, 1992, p. 34) states “with love and heretical or herethics, a new ethical concept based on woman as mother, as a prototype or metaphor for one who deals with the other through love... For Kristeva, the ethical consists in reaching out to the other.” Kristeva’s herethics then is a maternal ethics based on her own experiences of motherhood, and as such, marks an appropriate ethical position for this research.

Through these images of Georgia and Henry I incorporate a maternal ethical approach that stems from my experiences of motherhood, which are based on acceptance and love. Kristeva (1983, p. 263) believes, “of mother.... For an heretical ethics separated from morality, a herethics, is perhaps no more than that which in life makes bonds, thoughts, and therefore the thought of death, bearable: herethics is undeath.... love.” I celebrate Kristeva’s outlaw ethics with depictions of a repressed maternal that embraces the negatives and positives of maternal passion via a heretical and *photographie féminine* approach. Consequently, these images of my children represent encounters that depict a maternal relationship which is based on love rather than the Law. This research fuses and foregrounds female subjectivity with a maternal ethical approach to reproduce the uncertain surrenders that circulates between self and other in the mother–child union.

abject, fetish and the perverse

It is important to acknowledge the significance, function and interrelationship of the abject, fetish and the perverse to the maternal and subsequently to this particular project. In *Powers of horror* (1982) Kristeva, as I have previously argued, draws a correlation between the abject, the semiotic maternal and artistic practice and explores the potential of the abject to facilitate *jouissance*. Furthermore, the abject allows an agitation of the boundaries between self/other, subject/object that are established upon entry into the symbolic. According to Kristeva (1982), the abject and the perverse are interrelated and the abject is perverse because it is a corrupting force. Indeed, it is the ability of the abject and the perverse to reveal the vulnerabilities of the Symbolic that has delivered them as delicious sides to accommodate subversion for many feminist artists and photographers.

The fetish, too, is also linked to both the abject and the perverse because “the fetish is an object that through the idealization of surface at once reveals and conceals a core of abjection” (Richard Allen. 2007, p. 124). Many maternal photographers, some of whom I have noted in an earlier chapter, utilise the abject to introduce fetishism, a perverse behaviour linked to sexuality, by fetishizing their children. Indeed Kristeva (2005) identifies that a mother’s fetishisation of her child’s

body is a means to play out the madness and perversion that accompanies motherhood. It is this link between the abject, fetish, and the perverse in maternity, identified by Kristeva (2005), that assures their significance to my own maternal photographic practice.

Freud developed his idea of the fetish in an article titled *Fetishism* (1927) where he describes the male fear of castration. According to Grosz (1989, p. 57) “fetishism, in psychoanalytic terms, is the disavowal of maternal castration...the fetish substitutes for the missing maternal phallus and is put in its place in order to hide its absence.” Primarily, the fetish is considered by Freud to be a response available only to the male child upon witnessing the evidence of his mother's castration. However, Barbara Creed (1993, p. 21) states that “in general, the fetishist is usually assumed to be male, although ...Freud did allow that female fetishism was a possibility. The notion of female fetishism is much neglected although it is present in various patriarchal discourses.” Kristeva, though, develops Freud's theory of the fetish by declaring “language is the fetish which ultimately substitutes for the absent mother in the symbolic order” (Rosemary Betterton, 1996, p. 151). After the speaking subject takes up language and enters the Symbolic Order the loss of the mother becomes a timeless ache that can be alleviated with fetishism. In *Revolution in poetic language* (1986, p. 113-115) Kristeva explains that poetry, music and art provide an opportunity to destabilise the stability of the symbolic through fetishism. Kristeva maintains (1986, p. 115):

the subject of poetic language clings to the help fetishism offers. And so, according to psychoanalysis, poets as individuals fall under the category of fetishism; the very practice of art necessitates reinvesting the maternal *chora* so that it transgresses the symbolic order; and, as a result, this practice easily lends itself to so-called perverse structures.

Fetishisation through art practice offers the practitioner psychic relief from mourning the loss of the maternal object, for as Kristeva (1986, p. 115) declares “isn't art the fetish *par excellence*?” Furthermore Jacques Derrida (2010, p. 33) asserts “all photography is from the outset a fetish, the immediate possibility of fetishization.” Indeed, I utilise photography to fetishise my children as a means of assuaging my maternal mourning with my practice, stemming the loss that accompanies their separation from me. I ‘work through’ my own ‘maternal madness’ with the fetish. Kristeva's ideas on art practice and fetish according to Tsu-Chung Su (2005, p. 185) “attribute to her melancholic artists an artistic and fetishistic triumph, achieved through an *Aufhebung* that both posits and sublimates maternal loss.” The fetish, then facilitates transcendence of my melancholic mourning. Therefore I reveal attentiveness to the fetish throughout these uncertain surrenders, repeatedly and in multiple ways, through lighting, setting, location, expression and gesture.

One image of Georgia taken outside 'The House of Fetish' on Sydney's Oxford St contains a literal reference to the fetish. Georgia stands confidently beneath the shop's sign, which is situated on one of Sydney's notorious nightclub strips. Two men pass Georgia as she stands defiantly addressing the camera with her solid stance and insolent expression. This image references the power of the fetish to destabilise the masculine symbolic through Georgia's unwavering look into the camera as she stands under the fetish sign unfazed and flanked by the passing men. The image constitutes an attack on and corruption of the Symbolic and instead reveals a struggle against the loss of the semiotic maternal via the introduction of the fetish. Kristeva asks? (1986, p. 115) "doesn't poetry lead to the establishment of an object that is never clearly posited ...the subject of poetic language clings to the help fetishism offers." In this image, Georgia and I collaborate to resurrect the maternal *chora* through the assistance of the fetish, consolidated in the defiance of Georgia's posture and the location of the setting.

Fetishism allows me to introduce the perverse through abjection in my photographic practice. Tina Chanter (2008, p. 287) says "abjection also constitutes a site for the possible reworking of fetishism." As I have previously discussed in some detail in former chapters, the incorporation of the abject is a consistent feature in this research and much maternal photography. The abject enables a continual rotation of the fetish. The abject, according to Kristeva (1982, p. 2), is "improper or unclean", that which is cast out, a wound, defiled, disgusting – vomitous. Yet, despite its inherent link to horror, the abject also has the potential for release, for "becoming". For Kristeva, the maternal and the abject remain forever entwined. Linked to rebirth through expulsion, the abject involves "the shame of compromise, of being in the middle of treachery. The fascinated start that leads me toward and separates me from them" (Kristeva, 1982, p. 2). These uncertain surrenders between my children and myself revel in the maternal abject and expose my own 'treacherous' fascination with the two people who have 'swarmed' inside of my body. The pictures perpetually portray my sickening fear of loss as Georgia and Henry move away from me, yet they also promise a mutually beneficial release through separation for us both together, mother and child.

The abject is further pronounced in the creative component of this research to create unrest in the photographs, displace identity and order and to create uncertainty. I photograph Georgia and Henry at what could be said to be improper moments, when they are wounded, dirty, unsmiling and contemptuous, sometimes in uneasy poses and uncomfortable locations. Allmark (2002, p. 8) also describes her incorporation of the abject through depicting dirt in her images as a means of representing "matter out of place," a notion which she draws from Mary Douglas (1966). Through photographing pornographic magazine images scattered in the street, Allmark maintains "a selection of my photographs relate to dirt aesthetics ...Pornography removed from the intimacy of the private room and left in the public space of the street is literally 'dirt as a matter out of place.'"

Like Allmark, who makes private matters public in her practice, I too collapse the private and public realm with depictions of the conventionally hidden abject maternal relationship exposed in the public realm. One particular image of Georgia which is taken on the street outside of our home shows her wickedly sporting 'a shit eating grin' as chocolate oozes out from between her teeth and across her lips. The sauce looks like dirt or faeces and produces a reaction of disgust upon viewing that is offset by her sinister smile. Here 'dirt is matter out of place' and is deliberately incorporated as a means of disruption, for as Su (2005, p. 19) contends, "the maternal Thing can be the abject states which unsettle the symbolic's limits." Consequently, Georgia and I took mutual pleasure in presenting 'matter out of place'. United in *jouissance*, together we disrupt identity and order by the inclusion of the 'improper and unclean' abject in the construction of this particular image.

Several images of Henry's wounds and bodily rash also develop the abject to add a perverse, contaminant quality to the photographs and reference the fragility of the borders of the corporeal. According to Kristeva (1982, p. 4), "abjection...is immoral, sinister, scheming, and shady: a terror that disassembles, a hatred that smiles, a passion that uses the body for barter instead of inflaming it, a debtor who sells you up, a friend who stabs you." One instance where the body is used for 'barter' is apparent as Henry raises his arm to reveal a rash that is breaking out from under his armpit. The spread of the skin disorder on the surface of Henry's skin illustrates the threat of bodily corruption as a continual possibility. Kristeva (1982, p. 3) states "my body extricates itself, as being alive, from that border. Such wastes drop so that I might live, until, from loss to loss, nothing remains in me and my entire body falls beyond the limit." In this image of Henry, and I as his mother, acknowledge the 'perpetual dangers' of the body and the horrors of separation, expressing Kristeva's revelations on the sway of abjection.

Another image, which refers to the vulnerable borders and bodies is an image of Henry's plastered abdomen. Underneath the plaster the faint mark of the wound is apparent. The plaster applied by myself to contain the wound, operates as a patch between the interior of Henry's child body and the imposition of the exterior world. The image again references the pain of separation between mother and child via a depiction of the abject. "Abjection preserves what existed in the archaism of pre-objectal relationship, in the immemorial violence with which a body becomes separated from another body in order to be" (Kristeva, 1982, p. 10). Through the abject, then, I acknowledge maternal passion and the ongoing struggle of separation between mother and child, and utilise abjection as a means for psychic relief and *jouissance*.

Significantly, through these photographs I also endeavour to acknowledge ambiguity and the conflicting dynamics of the maternal relationship via an incorporation of the abject. The commemoration of the ambiguous throughout the images is further reflected in my choice of title for

this project, *Uncertain surrenders*, which intimates ambivalence, yet also the inevitability and potency of the maternal bond. The title sets up a paradox that suggests the inherent contradictions of the maternal connection. As I have outlined in an earlier chapter, Roszika Parker (2005) maintains it is when we yield to the coexistence of conflicting emotions that we become open to new possibilities for subjectivity and reciprocity with the other. In the construction of these photographs I have utilised uneasy pose, juxtapositions and selected locations to reveal an intimacy between my children and myself that unsettles, confuses and disrupts. Consequently, I reference the abject and the maternal by provoking ambiguity around the mother/child relationship, which problematises conventional notions of identity. I blur boundaries and reveal subjects that express fragility and disjunction, embrace confusion and delight in the delicate, uncertain manner that mother and child feel between each other.

Mother/daughter—mother/son: Gender, age and representation

As this research is grounded in a feminist perspective, one which acknowledges that western culture is socially structured to privilege the masculine in a gender-based economy that naturalises male subjectivity, it is important to discuss the implications of the gender differences between Georgia and Henry and any inconsistencies in the relationship between mother and daughter in contrast to mother and son. Luce Irigaray (2008, p. 77) states “sexuate difference is the most basic and most universal difference. It is also the difference which operates, or ought to operate, each time in the connection between nature and culture.” As such, sexual difference connects to identity in the relationship between body and culture. Moreover, Irigaray (2008, p. 77) maintains “neither is it the same to be born from the same gender as one’s own or from another gender, and to be able to or not be able to engender as one’s mother did.” Therefore, I accept that my relationship with both Georgia and Henry and their response to this project and myself is particular to their gender and impacts on the way I represent them through this work. It is furthermore necessary to address the significance of each child’s age to the ways in which each child involved themselves in the research and their subsequent portrayal in the images.

According to Irigaray (2008) the mother/daughter relationship remains consistently disparaged and cultivated as rivalrous rather than encouraged in patriarchal culture. While Irigaray (2008) believes that the mother/daughter relationship is complicity linked to nature which promises “the possibility of *doing as*: begetting in oneself....The filiation with the mother...remains incontinuity with matter” (Irigaray, 2008, p. 11). While the link to nature between mother and daughter cannot be overlooked, the importance of including a female-based culture is imperative for the development of affirmative mother/daughter relations. Irigaray (2008, p. 155) succinctly states:

to recover a correct relation with the mother one needs to be faithful to one's own feminine belonging... But to place herself only in her natural female genealogy is not sufficient for a woman to have access to a culture of the feminine, notably because we need a cultural genealogy with the feminine... to develop a culture of her own while being faithful to her natural belonging, to become an I she with a cultural world which is suitable for her.

In this research it is my aim to create a feminised language in the cultural realm, which provides new possibilities for mother/daughter relations, via uneasy depictions of my teenage daughter. Grosz (1989, p. 126) says "recognising feminine specificity implies seeing and developing other kinds of discourse, different forms of evaluation and new procedures for living in and reflecting on day to day life.". Conventional media driven images of teenage girls often depict slim, shiny haired, white toothed, pretty specimens, which impact on adolescent girls' personal perceptions. Elma Mitchell (cited in Sprague & Keeling, 2007) wrote about her own vulnerabilities during adolescence in her poem *Self portraits* when she says "I bought myself at Boots--the cosmetic counter/ And the slimming aids. I shopped for myself in/ windows/ And women's magazines, and then in the long, long/ mirrors/ In the eyes of the watchers of birds." I specifically chose not to include any photographs in this series where Georgia appeared especially glamorous or any that resembled the fashion genre too closely, I also eschewed Photoshop as a tool for retouching and beautification. Instead, I selected images that revealed a more ambiguous, open reflection of Georgia's gendered self, in an attempt to unsettle the cultural norms that commonly accompany portrayals of teenage female sexuality.

These photographs of Georgia represent and validate complex opportunities for mother/daughter reciprocity and develop multiple aspirations for women that refuse patriarchal containment. As Rich (1976, p. 220) observes, "mothers and daughters have always exchanged with each other beyond the verbally transmitted lore of female survival a knowledge that is subliminal, subversive, preverbal: the knowledge flowing between two alike bodies." The images of Georgia reflect the intensity of the mother/daughter bond and are therefore complex and contradictory, purposefully ambiguous in their depiction of beauty and menace. One image of Georgia sitting on the road distinctly references the flow between mother and daughter. A visible muddied line, like an umbilical cord, appears to run from the camera into Georgia's body as she sits open legged on the road. The travelling line represents an understanding brought about from the likeness of our messy womanly bodies and our shared 'subliminal, subversive, preverbal knowledge' spoken of by Rich. Moreover, Georgia wears a t-shirt that is printed with the word 'horror' so while the image reveals the strength and closeness of our bond, it similarly depicts the potential for pain and conflict between us. I consistently perpetuate the ambivalence of maternal passion in the mother/daughter bond to reveal the tensions and potency of maternity as well as the anxieties of female teenage hood. Indeed, Andrea O'Reilly and Sharon Abbey (2000, p. 3) maintain that "for daughters to be

empowered through identification with mothers, mothers themselves must model strength and connection; they must in other words, practice relational and resistant mothering.” Through the acknowledgement of maternal ambivalence in this research I endeavour to provide an example of ‘strength and connection’ with my daughter. Thus together, as women and mother/daughter, we may develop the capacity to challenge the restrictive singular knowledge which are perpetually promoted in conventional imagery of both maternity and teenage girls.

Grosz maintains that Irigaray “aims excessively to overburden existing forms of language and dominant discourses with their own ambiguities, the affirmations they unconsciously make, the materiality they refuse to acknowledge” (Grosz, 1989, p. 127). Overwhelmingly the photographic discourse of teenage girls in contemporary culture reinforces socially determined gender stereotypes. Representations of teenagers, and particularly females, disavow multiple opportunities for gender identity. Girls are usually portrayed in dichotomous, fixed ways, either as one dimensional, shiny, pretty things or highly sexualized and uncontrollable. The ramifications of limiting depictions of adolescence are noted by Johnson and McClanahan (1999, p. 1) who state “gender identity is acquired at a very young age, but it is during adolescence that this identity, with its concomitant beliefs and stereotypes, becomes a major force in the lives of young men and women.” In order to work against conventional, limiting images of female teenage hood Georgia and I worked together to produce portraits charged with ambiguity that refused to affirm societal norms, particularly in terms of gender. According to Bright (2005 p. 20), “a portrait is a questioning or exploration of self and identity ... where identity can be changed in an instant.” These portraits of Georgia challenge fixed notions of identity and instead offer fluid possibilities for female subjectivity.

There is a confusion that accompanies the provisional identity that adolescence brings. Georgia’s fragile teenage state reflects the vulnerable processes that are involved in the search for a gendered identity. Her struggle with an emerging self has caused me to ruminate on my own youth and the bittersweet fragility of adolescence. Siegel (2001, p. 13), says:

We delight in the persistence of adolescence. Having lost the raw feelings, the ability we once had to desire and to rage (our senses either sharpened or dulled by growing up), we retain it nostalgically, longing for the still – resonating emotions of our adolescence.

These photographs are an intimate visual record of my daughter’s teenage years; they are ambiguous representations that depict a fragile adolescent identity.

According to Muuss (1996, p. 16), adolescence “is the period from puberty until full adult status has been attained.” It is a transitional period that incorporates biological, psychological and social

changes within the individual and there are many different and competing theories that attempt to define and describe adolescence. Many theorists assert that adolescence is a time of conflict and personal crisis. According to Matteson (1975, p. 1), "the conflict of adolescence is the search for identity, the struggle to choose among many alternatives and affirm who one is in relation to the larger society." Psychologist G. Stanley Hall (1916) was the first to introduce a psychology of adolescence and relating it to a time of *Sturm und Drang* (storm and stress). A style of eighteenth century German literature, *Sturm und Drang* included the works of Goethe among others and influenced classical composers of the day. Hall saw a correlation between the passionate literary movement and adolescence. "It is a literary movement full of idealism, commitment to a goal, revolution against the old, expression of personal feelings, passion and suffering" (Muuss, 1996, p. 17). Hall, a formative theorist of adolescence, articulated that adolescence is a turbulent and transitional phase which promises new birth "for the higher and more completely human traits are now born" (Hall, 1996, p. xiii).

The possibility of 'new birth' and search for identity that Hall reveals accompany adolescence is significant. Adolescence reveals the potential for multiplicity of identity within the subject that contradicts restrictive unified subjectivity. Muuss (1996, p. 17) states that Hall:

perceived the emotional life of the adolescent as an oscillation between contradictory tendencies. Energy, exaltation and supernatural activity are followed by indifference, lethargy and loathing. Exuberant gaeity, laughter, and euphoria make place for dysphoria, depressive gloom, and melancholy.

The vicissitudes of adolescence that Hall isolates indicate the potential for this phase in human development to challenge ideas of fixed identity. In the photographs of Georgia it was my desire to reference both the turbulence of adolescence and its complex, yet fluid potential for subjectivity. In particular, I was interested in the development and struggles of gender identity that accompany adolescence for, as I have noted, the emergence of sexuality is central to theories on adolescence. Many of the images of Georgia throughout *Uncertain surrenders* reference the intricacy of female teenage sexuality. On the images of Georgia, Bright (2009) says, "caught in the crossfire of womanhood and girlhood her transitional state is awkward and confusing....Her natural beauty is tinged with vulnerability showing already that female body awareness is a more complex and confusing thing than the male equivalent." As the series has developed over the years, the photographs of an ever-changing Georgia provide clues to a complex and complicated phase of life; they also raise questions regarding the construction of self and sexual identity in adolescence. However, like adolescence itself, the photographs are complex, fragile, and ambiguous. As such, they can only offer slippery verisimilitude rather than any stable, certain identity.

The images of a younger Henry, in contrast to those of adolescent Georgia, depict a more fearless stage of development. On the photographs of Henry at seven years old Susan Bright (2009, p. 4) comments, “armed with the signifiers of masculinity, he bursts onto the paper with barely a concealed air of threat... at age seven he is ready for the mean streets.” Indeed the early images of Henry reflect a confident, camera-savvy child. Moreover, Bright (2009, p. 4) adds:

Henry is the star, the way he apes adult behaviour is unsettling. The glint in his eye shows he knows about how photographs operate. He is already a sophisticated model aware of the power his good looks and the effectiveness of a pose.

Henry’s willingness to perform for the camera was most noticeable when he was able to role-play behaviour that appealed to his sense of masculinity: for example, either holding a toy weapon, sporting a fake tattoo or showing wounds acquired from rough play. Henry was less enthusiastic and would not allow me to direct him towards images that allowed for the introduction of elements like costume and pose, which subvert male gender stereotypes. Therefore, I am aware that Henry’s poses often illustrate machismo, which could be said to conform to conventional gender stereotypes. However, I have introduced key vulnerable images of Henry that depict fragility and work to destabilise the bravado that he was eager to display for the camera. The juxtaposition of a contemplative Henry (which became more evident as he grew older), alongside the more robust portrayals in the series, creates tension and therefore allows for a questioning of any easy, stable perceptions of masculinity.

To further introduce tension and create confusion in the images of Henry and representations of masculinity, I consistently rely on the tension produced between the staged and the intuitive in the creation of the images. Unlike Hawarden, who only photographed her daughters and not her only son, I include representations of masculinity to engage with masculine dynamics, which may impact on my son. I do this as a means of inclusion — to accommodate the other. While I may set up a shot in a certain location at a given time to reveal mood and drama, I also wait for an instinctive moment to unfold which unsettles by introducing uncertainty and contradiction. In some images of Henry, his extreme macho pose is countered by an expression or look that produces uncertainty and vulnerability. For example, a confident pose may be tempered by a downward glance. In one particular image Henry is placed in a military hall in Greenwich Palace and at the moment the shutter is tripped he covers his face with his hands. The random moment in the staged environment creates instability, contradiction and depth of meaning in multiple ways, leading to questions about identity, age and gender as well as the complexity of the maternal relationship and photography.

I am also aware that the Oedipus complex developed in Freudian theory pervades ideas on the mother/ son relationship in western culture and, as Rich (1976, p. 202) asserts, “every culture invents its special version of the mother son relationship.” Freud positions the mother as anxiety-bearing and castrating yet simultaneously loving and seductive to her son. According to Rich (1976, p. 201) “the Freudian view of the son is saturated with the Freudian hostility and sentimentality toward the mother.” Hence, ideas surrounding the mother/son relationship in western culture have provided a conundrum for feminist theory. In particular, Freud’s notion that the son must reject the mother in order to identify with the father to become a man remains difficult. The significant problem with the woman’s role in the Oedipus model is identified by Babette Smith in *Mothers and sons* (1995, p. 18) when she states “a mother’s responsibility was to facilitate the rejection of herself or risk endangering her son’s masculinity. The greatest hurdle to the Oedipus theory, was the risk that a mother’s sexuality would activate her sons desire for her.” Smith (1995), Rennie Forcey (1987), and Rich (1976) all maintain that the greatest taboo in western culture is mother/ son incest and societal fear of the potency of this desire contributes to the perpetuation of mother blame and mothers being seen as problematic for boys.

As a feminist, mother, and photographer, I struggle to understand the complexities involved in mothering children of both genders, as each present their own special challenges and nuances. Mothering a son is especially complex because, according to Smith (1995, p. 3), “for centuries, women have mothered male children without understanding the masculine culture of which their boys are a part.” Masculinity which defines men as powerful, brave and in control, demands certain behaviour from boys that continues to disadvantage both males and females alike. Consequently, I am especially mindful of the complications that may manifest from the complexities involved in the mother/son relationship. Some of the images of Henry, where he could be seen to be role-playing ‘macho’ behaviour, may seem particularly confronting from a feminist perspective. According to Rich (1976, p. 205) “it is a painful contradiction when a mother who has herself begun to break female stereotypes sees her young son caught in patterns of ... the world of male animal posturing from which one male can emerge as dominant.” Nevertheless, I maintain that the images of Henry do not promote machismo but rather reference my own fears of the consequences that stereotypical masculinity may involve for my son. Rich (1976, p. 206), states “we wish for our sons – as for our daughters that they may grow up un mutilated by gender roles.” Consequently, my images of Henry, express my desire to create a language which problematises conventional restrictive gender roles.

The photographs of Henry incorporate deliberate elements which disrupt any simple socially authorised opportunities for the representation of machismo masculinity as natural and stable. I consistently use jarring juxtapositions within the frame to create a sense of uneasiness and to

reference the limits of macho stereotypes. One particular image of Henry pointing and ready to shoot a toy gun towards my camera may seem to imitate masculine hostility. However, his feminine pout and cherry red lips paradoxically offset the aggression in his stance and seeming control over the weapon. These factors are linked to the feminine and therefore disrupt the machismo of his steady pose. Henry's longer, shiny, pretty hair and smooth baby skin also indicate an alignment with the feminine which therefore disrupts any assurance of the masculine emerging as dominant. Furthermore, this image also references a dynamic play between mother's camera and son's toy gun; both intimated as weapons of power. As I have previously mentioned in this chapter, the camera has been viewed as a weapon, Rod Giblett (2008, p. 69) states:

The gun and camera make space and time into events, and thereby master both. They bring events into their purview, make them thereby into targets and constitute them as objects in the discourse of mastery.... The gun and the camera ... survey and coordinate space to make it traversable.

Through the image mutual recognition of mother and son is played out in a new space continuum, which Barthes asserts is made possible through photography and therefore facilitates a traversable dynamic relation between camera and gun, male and female, mother and son. This image also problematises the idea that the responsible maternal figure should be the sole responsible adult protector perpetually in servitude to the male child. Rennie Forcey (1987, p. 23) says, "cultural imperatives of patriarchal societies assign responsibility for the nurturing of children to one family member, the mother." Moreover, the photograph also disturbs the notion perpetuated in Christian culture that the mother/son relationship is free of struggle and that the son is dominant in the mother/son bond. Kristeva (1986, p. 142) notes that, "compared with the love that binds mother to son, all other 'human relationships' stand revealed as flagrant imitations." With many of the photographs of Henry, I seek to destabilise the opaque layers of cultural and religious convention that constitute the myth of the responsible mother figure in eternal sacrifice to the son. Nevertheless, I also use photography to deepen my relationship with Henry. O'Reilly (2001, pp. 15–16) believes "mothers must model and teach their sons specific behaviours and strategies that will enable them to stay in connection." Thus, I use photography as a strategy to maintain a connection with Henry through mutual recognition.

The photograph, then, provides a complex but appropriate mechanism to unpack and challenge the way gendered identities are shaped, cultivated and promoted as cultural norms within society. These images of Georgia and Henry resist common stereotypical cultural representations of sexual and gender identity and instead participate in Kristeva's notion that we are all 'subjects in process', which I discussed in chapter one. Therefore, together we have used the photographic portrait to reveal uncertainty, vulnerability and the fluidity of identity in an attempt to enrich opportunities for

exploration of subjectivity for both mother and child. Furthermore, as I have outlined in the first chapter, this maternal inquiry has been informed by theory which calls for the reconception of the maternal function in creative practice. In particular both Kristeva and Klein's ideas on the significance of the maternal relationship in psychoanalysis have been critical in shaping the photographs in this research. Parker's study of maternal ambivalence has also contributed to the ways that I have combined theory in practice. I have endeavored to represent maternal ambivalence and my children's ambivalence in the photographs as a means of subverting conventional notions of the maternal relationship and to depict a powerful and complex maternal bond.

Throughout chapter two I explained my definition of the term maternal photographer and aligned myself with other biological mothers who have photographed their children to create a language of motherhood that reflects the experience of mothers. The maternal voice continues to be muffled in contemporary western culture and I suggest that photography can provide a mechanism to tell of 'maternal passion'. Each photographer I examined in this section displayed Liss's "feminist strategies of motherhood" and therefore they have produced photographs which displace limiting conventional maternal attributes. Hawarden, Carucci and Maybin all reinvest 'maternal passion' through their work and thus share the anxiety, drama and intimacy of the maternal through the incorporation of the abject, the perverse and the combination of beauty and menace. Like my own photographs, it is apparent that each image Hawarden, Carucci and Maybin take of their children is autobiographical; they reveal something of the mother and maternity rather than just a singular perspective on childhood.

Chapters three and four outline the influence of photography on the development of childhood and the controversy that surrounds childhood photography in contemporary western culture. The depiction of children in photography can be seen as ethically problematic because of a perceived unequal relationship of power between adults and children, which favors the adult. Childhood in Western culture has been constructed as vulnerable and weak in contrast to the powerful and authoritative adult. Kincaid (1992) and Jenks (2005) argue that the fabrication of homogeneous childhood innocence is an adult fantasy that is detrimental to children. I propose that the collaborative approach to photography I have undertaken in this research can accommodate the agency of the child and shift understandings of childhood as a unitary experience to a more complex position. James, Jenks and Prout (1998) maintain that it is imperative to develop new ways of thinking about childhood that recognise the potential of children to facilitate their own conditions for childhood in the social world. Moreover, that limiting debate about the depiction of childhood in photography to articulations of moral panic and public anxiety, fails to engage with a complicated vision of childhood that releases children from the adult fantasy of childhood

innocence. The images in *Uncertain surrenders* offer depictions of what Higonnet (1998) describes as 'knowing children'. As such Georgia and Henry are sophisticated accomplices who are aware of the powers of their own bodies and the complexities of the passion which motivates my maternal looking throughout this research. As described earlier "it is thus breathing life into the subject" (Allmark, 2003, p190) through the vitality of my interactions with my children.

While there is no doubt that children need protection from abuse and sexualisation through law, censorship of photographs that portray children can silence intellectual engagement with ideas that challenge conservative notions of childhood and the family. Chapter four examines the potential of childhood photography, especially images of children by maternal photographs, to create documents that Millner (2010) believes address wide themes relating to the social, political and greater to notions of being. Despite a climate of suspicion and repression, maternal photographers continue to portray the tender and fierce intimacies of the maternal relationship that Butler (2008) agrees represents the love of mother and child. Through my photographs I strive to represent the intensity of the love I feel for Georgia and Henry and reflect on the weight of the responsibility that accompanies motherhood. My children are my greatest source of joy and sorrow. This motivates my mindfulness of the fragility of being and the passions of human existence that they must abide. These images of Georgia and Henry combine beauty and menace. They are metaphors of our deep connection and my lasting maternal capacity to love them.

Letting Go

"In metal" (Low, 2001, track 12)

Filling holes with tiny sounds
Shining from the inside out
Picture of you where it began
In metal
In metal

Partly hate to see you grow
And just like your baby shoes
Wish I could keep your little body
In metal
In metal

As the lyrics of "In metal" expressed by maternal vocalist Mimi Parker intimate, the desire of a mother to hold onto her infant can be intense. Overwhelmingly, my own struggle to accept the inevitable movement of my children away from me is bloodshot; every sense of satisfaction I feel

with their unfolding is beset by a melancholy that accompanies loss. I, too, have sought to hold on to my own babies in metal, through the metallic silver halides that are impregnated in the gelatin of the transparency film I load into the heavy metal body of the large format Pentax 6x7 camera I use. Each trip of the shutter becomes a futile attempt to capture something of my children that will never come again. While I know that it is impossible to keep them, I persist.

The photographs in the book of images are arranged to work aesthetically, develop a narrative and create depth of meaning rather than to follow a chronological order. For example, *Uncertain surrenders # 2* and *Uncertain Surrenders # 3* are placed alongside each other because they both possess a richness of colour and a painterly quality that makes them visually dynamic together. In tandem, these images also introduce the complexity of the processes of looking between mother photographer and child subject which I have discussed in detail in previous sections of this thesis. Henry hides his face behind his hands as he stands on the steps of the Painted Hall at Greenwich Palace and Georgia, dramatically lit, is seen on the facing page glancing tenderly and knowingly around at him. The placement of these two images demonstrates my willingness to acknowledge the social anxiety that surrounds images of children in contemporary culture. The following two images, *Uncertain surrenders # 4* and *Uncertain surrenders # 5*, like most others which face each other throughout the book, also work together both visually and symbolically. Henry is seen here on the left page armed and aiming at the camera, while on the right, an unarmed more open Georgia also directs her look at her mother and into the camera. These two pictures work together to reference notions of power that surround photography and the mutuality of the maternal gaze and the process of looking between mother and child.

The front cover of my book of photographs which depicts Henry standing under an archway, wearing a hoodie with the trademark symbol GAP stitched onto the front panel, reveals my maternal melancholia. The arch itself represents the *chora* and the word GAP reflects my anxiety about the ininevitable chasm I must face as my children grow. The final image taken for *Uncertain surrenders* and shown on the back cover of the book is of Georgia as she leaves Australia to travel the world. These two photographs suggest my lament at the separation and movement of my children away from me through 'time and distance'. The image of Georgia, now eighteen and no longer officially a child, is taken at the departure gate of Perth International Airport and the gates here further reference the *chora*. A friend once described these particular departure gates to me as the gates of sorrow and the image reflects Georgia's and my mutual uncertainty at this significant parting. I missed her before she left. No amount of mental preparation for her leaving could ease or diminish the depth of my sadness, concern for her welfare or fear of the unknown that change brings. When I look at this photograph I am confronted by the impossibility of holding on to my children, regardless of their age. Nevertheless, like the chromogenic photographic reversal process

I used, a photographic method that develops multiple layers of metal silver into a unique, colour enriched, positive image, in *Uncertain surrenders*, we have generated new beginnings and opportunities for subjective exploration. This collaborative photographic research project initiates and contributes to a language around maternal passion in visual culture which extends the significance of motherhood studies. With photography and a mutual acknowledgement and acceptance of surrender to uncertainty, together we have created the potential for an enduring maternal return.

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